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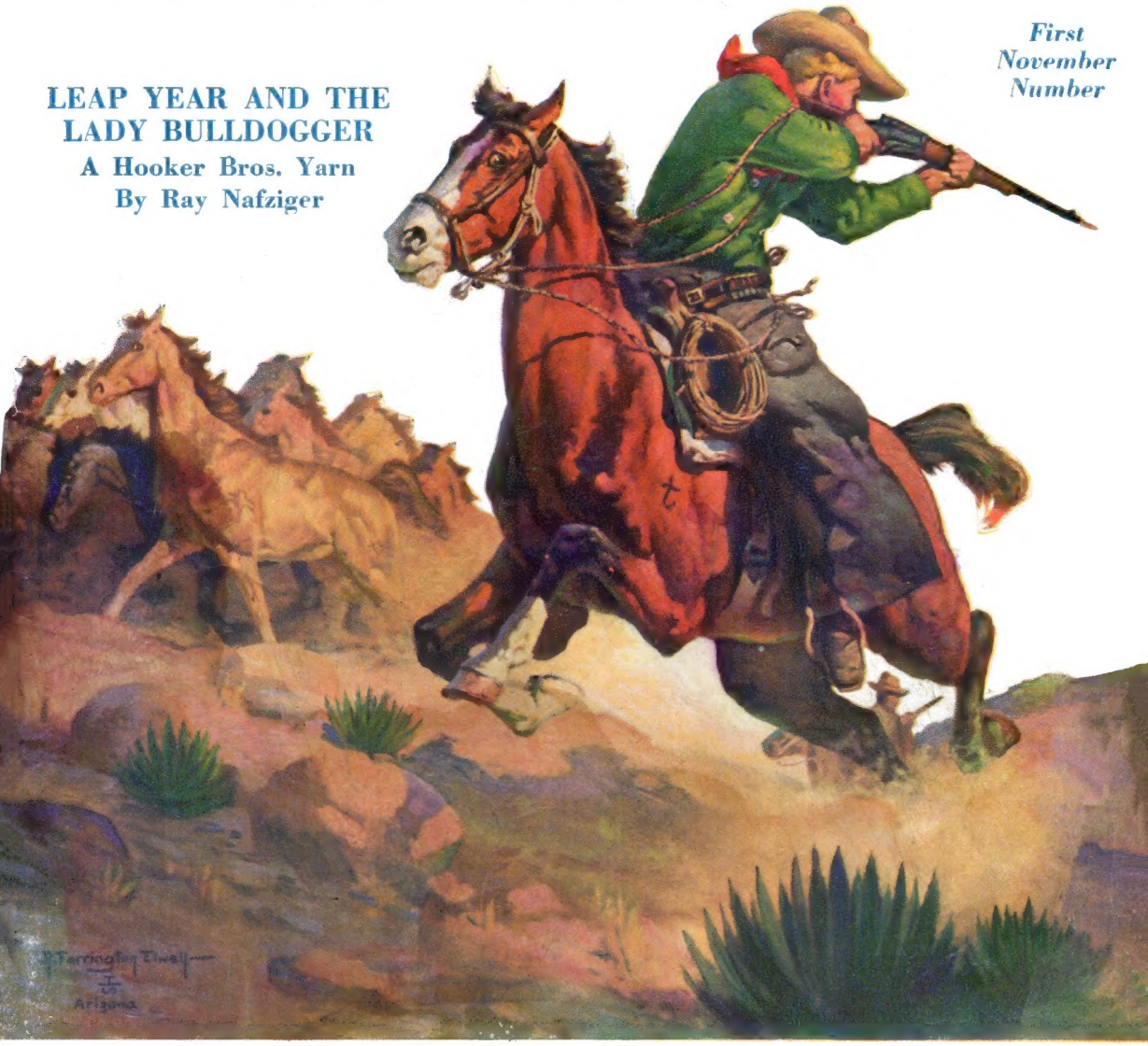
A CLAYTON MAGAZINE

First November Number

LEAP YEAR AND THE LADY BULLDOGGER
A Hooker Bros. Yarn
By Ray Nafziger



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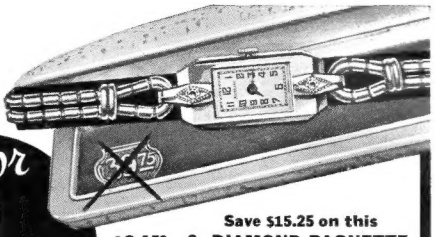

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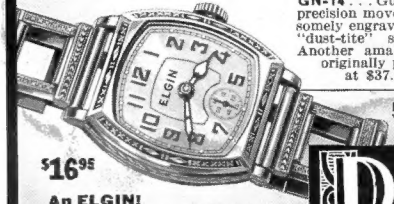

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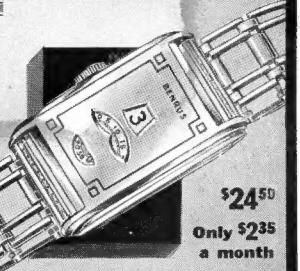

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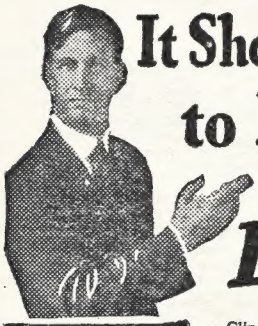

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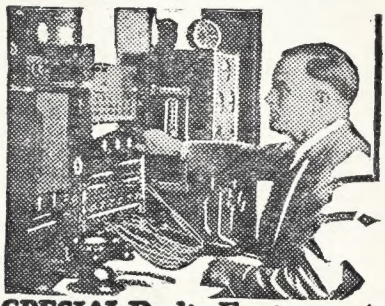

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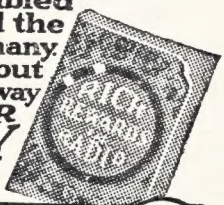

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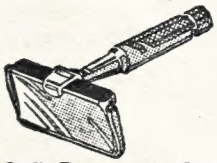

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LEAP YEAR AND THE LADY BULLDOGGER

By Ray Nafziger

This here Leap Year business certainly keeps the Hooker Bros. on the leap. First, there's One-ton Benson to rescue. He bulldogs himself into a swell mess, which he leaves to the diplomatick Stevie and Johnny. And then there's the Hookers themselves, busy fanning the sparks of trouble into roarin' fires. . . . But what are forest rangers for, anyway?

WHAT'S the matter with these here wommen what runs the range nowadays I'd like to git up and inquire? It used to be you had to look out the Apaches didn't lift your hair. But some of these here wommen today, they make a wilder, more dangerous bunch of scalp-hunters than them Redskins.

Lately they got this cow ranch at Canyon Lobo, which is run by me—Johnny Hooker—and my li'l' coot brother Stevie, with our three hands, "One-ton" Benson, old George and Pablo—run into a hole. This here bein' Leap Year has sure got us all on the leap. And if some sarcastic jasper wants to pass a wisecrack that the gals must be hard up to want to drop a loop over a bunch of culls like us, let him pass it.

For we sure had some close escapes lately, specially that One-ton Benson rider of ours. He's a big hefty giant, but a cowboy, ev'ry ton of him. At bulldoggin' around the local rodeos he sure takes the candy away reg'lar from the perfeshionals. And his good bulldoggin' was what got him tangled in this trouble—when he went over to Alvarado for the spring rodeo they hold there.

As it happens there's also at the same rodeo a perfeshional womman bulldogger, a widder named Mrs. Belle Bogard, the Lady Bulldogger from the Brazos, who's been settin' up in competition with Fox Hastings, the most famous of the girls that wrastles down these big steers. When One-ton took the first day's prize money in fast time, makin' them other hefty artists look foolish, this Belle

Bogard widder right away decides One-ton is a comer and why not git hooked up with him and go into the bulldoggin' game in a big way, raisin' a family of bulldoggers, startin' the children out with calfs so when they growed up they'd be able to bulldog elephants.

It bein' Leap Year and this Belle Bogard bein' frank, that's the kind o' proposition she puts up to One-ton down in the lobby of the hotel where him and me—Johnny Hooker—and my li'l' brother Stevie and our hand old George is stayin' durin' the festivities. One-ton comes rushin' up to our room still blushin' through the half-inch-thick skin on his neck and face.

"That widder is after me," he says. "In fact, she's a'most got me. She didn't ask me yes or no; she said why not let us git married and do it durin' this rodeo so's to git our names in the papers?"

"Wotta womman!" I says admirin'. "Bulldogs her a husband."

"Wotta womman, hell! This is serious," says One-ton real mad. "I like workin' for you boys and I like the country, but I'm takin' a train outa here tonight."

"Fergit it," Stevie tells him. "We'll git you out of this. Leave it to your old pals, Stevie and Johnny Hooker; we'll jerk you outa this mud hole."

"Yessir," I agrees to that hearty. "Leave it to us. We'll go right around and talk to this feemale and straighten all this out. Did you promise you'd marry her?"

"No, not exactly," said One-ton. "But I didn't tell her I wouldn't, neither. I jist sort of thought it best not to counterdict her and to let it pass. But she took it that I promised her, and her last words was, 'You be there, as I don't like men what try to back out on me.' And if you can git me outa this, you boys are sure true-blue pals, and I'll never forgit it," says that hefty One-ton, plumb filled with emotion.

"I got a hunch none of you stewed true-blue pals is goin' to forgit this after it's all over," puts in that croaker of a old George from the corner. Always stickin' in his oar, that old gazabo is, to predict a storm.

"What d'ya mean?" I inquires. "All we got to do is go and tell her real firm she made a mistake."

"Sure. Whash poshible trouble could there be?" asks Stevie, who's been takin' a li'l' too much liquid corn. "We're a pair of dishplomats whash settles trouble: we don't start it."

We go downstairs and push through the hotel lobby where no less than forty rodeo cowboys is explainin' how it happened they didn't win that afternoon. And it's a good thing they has rodeos, as it gives a lot of us cowboys on the range a lot of new ideas for alibis for not ketchin' calfs.

We find that the lady bulldogger is in a big room on the ground floor where a party is goin' on with booze flowin' free. She's about the heftiest damsel we ever saw, with a hard-lookin' face and a voice like a calliope.

"I know them kind," I states. "All you got to do is to be firm with her. They look bad, but they're easily bluffed."

"Sure," says Stevie. "We got to treat her rough."

We're still standin' sizin' her up when a galoot comes up and says, "Hello, girlie!" and hits her on the back. Wow! She turns around and she swats that hombre with the flat of her hand and he flies across the room and lands agin a table and slides to the floor and folds up like a camp chair.

"Who you think you're talkin' to—some dance-hall chippy?" she says real mad.

"I guess we better have another drink or two before we talk to her," I says to Stevie. "Maybe after all, bein' she's a lady, it may not pay to be so firm but to use gentler tacticks, and be real diplomatick."

"Sure, we'll be dishplomatick," says Stevie kinda thick-voiced, that boy never havin' been able to drink whiskey long before it affects him. "We don't want no fuss. No loud words."

"We won't have none," I predicts. "Not with us Hooker Bros. Why, we're so diplomatick we could sashay up and take a grizzly bear out of a trap."

"Eashy," says Stevie as he takes another drink. "And to think," he says kinda tearful, "they ain't got us in the dishplomatick service. No wonder they had a World War. Bring on that there Lady Bulldogger from the Brazos. Lesh go."

So we does it, amblin' over graceful to her side.

"Howdy, Miss Bogard," I says to her. "I'm a friend of One-ton Benson, and we come for a li'l' chat with you. And to straighten things out about this here marriage."

"What's that?" she says, rearin' up like a bo constrictor outa the grass. "What's there to straighten out? Is that big galoot thinkin' of jiltin' me, hey? If so, he shore picked out the wrong girl."

"No, nothin' like that," I tells her diplomatick as always. "Why, he's tickled to death at the idee. It's you we're worried about. You see this here One-ton Benson, he's sort of weak in the upper story."

"He may be weak in the head, but he can shore bulldog," she says. "That's all I care about. I a'ready got things all fixed up for the wedding tomorrer at the rodeo grounds. There's goin' to be movies took of it. We're going to be married with each of us settin' on top of a prize Hereford bull from the stock show and the preacher settin' on top another bull. And afterward we're each goin' to bulldog a steer."

"Look here, Miss Bogard," I says to her, speakin' up real decisive. "This is all a mistake. This can't go on."

"Are yuh tryin' to wreck our weddin' ceremony?" she busts out real mad. "You homely-lookin' galoot, yuh will come hornin' into the romance of two lovin' bulldogger hearts, will yuh?"

"Hey, better be more dishplomatick," Stevie warns me, but I'm too busy duckin' to take advice.

Stevie, who's slipped around behind me, he don't see that lady's arm come out and he staggers back and falls out through the window into street. I duck the second time, but the third time I'm a li'l' too slow. She lands a pile-driver around my left ear and after that it seems there is a earthquake and the hotel falls in on me. I don't know how it comes about, but I hear a crash and then it seems I land on the sidewalk, kind of cut up by flyin' glass. Next I hear a *clang-clang* and a couple men is helpin' us into a auto of some kind while a crowd watches real interusted.

"Hey, I didn't order no taxi," pertests my li'l' brother Stevie.

"This is the kind of taxi you don't have to order, cowboy," says one of the fellers. "What's the idee of you two loadin' up with white mule and then jumpin' outa the windows without openin' 'em first?"

"Can't stand their likker nowadays, these young cowboys can't," says a old-timer in the crowd. "They don't make the men they used to have in my days."

"Izzat so?" I says. "Well, they don't make the same wommen neither."

"Wotta womman! Wotta womman!" mutters my li'l' Bro. Stevie.

After that they ride us down to the big adobe house where they pervide beds free of charge.

"Drunk, are they?" says the hombre in charge, and he asks our names, and how they can reach our friends, as they're easy on cowboys in town at rodeo time.

"Send round to the hotel for One-ton Benson," I requests 'em.

"Yeah," says Stevie. "Tell him

there's a coupla dishplomatsh in here what he'sh got to git outa jail. Retired dishplomatsh," adds Stevie, and he puts a finger to his eye. "Ouch!" he says. "Wotta womman!"

One-ton with old George comes down arrivin' about the time they've finished takin' a few stitches above Stevie's eye.

"What did I tell you?" says old George. "Diplomats? Them Hooker boys couldn't settle a quarrel between a pair of sucklin' peace doves."

"You're mistook about this woman," I tells One-ton as we head uptown ag'in. "You don't want to go shyin' away from the strong love of a lady like that. It's the kind of affection that comes to a man only onct in a lifetime. You're a lucky man, you are, One-ton."

"So that's what you think?" he states sour. "Didn't you promise to git me outa this?"

"All right, we will, if you insist," I agrees. "Have it your own way, altho it's agin our advice. If we was you, we'd accept this great happiness which is offered you. But if you want this romance blasted, we'll go ahead and blast it. Hooker Bros. sticks to their word."

"How'll you blast it?" he inquired interusted.

"Easy," I tells him. "Tomorrer at the rodeo you pretend to git hurt when you bulldog your steer. Then we'll carry you off to a hospital unconscious and you'll git out of that weddin' ceremony at the end of the rodeo. They can't marry a man off while he's unconscious."

"Do you think it will work?" he asks kinda dubious.

"How can it help but work?" I returns logical as always. "She can't marry no man what's unconscious, can she? We'll git a room at the hospital, and you'll stay there unconscious a day or so until we can sneak you out of town."

"I hope this works," says One-ton, still kinda doubtful.

"It'll work if the Hooker Bros. is runnin' it," predicts that croaker of a old George. "It'll work too well. But you won't land in no hospital, One-ton; they'll be carryin' you off to a cemetery."

NEXT day at this two-pint rodeo, everything happens as we planned. This here Wotta Womman Belle Bogard, the Lady Bulldogger from the Brazos, she's a'ready got the preacher and the bulls for the parties to set for the weddin' at the end of the contests, and she's a-rarin' to go.

"Go out and throw that Bull!" she yells encouragin' to One-ton as his turn comes. "Wring his neck, Big Boy."

One-ton, he waves his hand at her and they turn out his steer. With the hazer on one side and One-ton on the other, they chase that critter down the course. Then One-ton leans over and throws hisself from his horse and hits the ground, twistin' at the steer's horns. There's so much dust nobody exactly knows what happens, but all a-sudden One-ton has lost his hold of the steer and rolls off to the side and lays still.

Me and Stevie is all ready, and we run out from the sidelines with a stretcher and lay it alongside One-ton. He's knocked out so lifelike that we think maybe he really is hurt.

"How are you, One-ton?" I says to him.

"Fine!" he says enthoosiastic. "That was a great idee you got up."

All a-sudden we hear loud warnin' yells from the stands and we look back to see that fool steer of One-ton's come chargin' back our way.

Me and Stevie git a notion we can bulldog him as he comes sashayin' in, and I ketch him by one horn and Stevie by the other, but bulldoggin' was never any of our accomplishments. He drags us around a while and after steppin' all over my feet, he busts loose from Stevie and throws me about twenty foot in the air. It

seems to me I can hear a lot o' yellin' and horse hoofs thuddin' my way, and then I sorta pass out.

When I wake up I'm in a nice white-washed room and my bones feels all disconnected. I'm in a bed and as I'm wonderin' how I happened to fall into a rock-crusher, I see my li'l' brother Stevie layin' in a bed near mine, with his head all tied up with bandages. I guess this must be a hospital.

"Are you here, too?" I asks.

"Where would anybody be after bein' tromped all over by that big steer and the horses of a couple fool cowboys what was tryin' to rescue us?" he says real sharp. "If there'd be a few more of them rodeo hands tryin' to save us, they'd of had to bring a team of horses to drag off our carcasses like they do after a bull-fight."

"Psst!" we hear and we look around. One-ton is layin' in a bed near us, still playin' unconscious. Old George is settin' by him.

"That was a great idee you boys had," One-ton states. "It sure saved my bacon. I'm headin' back to the ranch and I'm holin' up until this Leap Year is over. And I can't thank you boys enough for what you done for me."

"Well, anyway, they can't say we ain't true-blue pals of yours," says Stevie as he grunts painful.

"True black and blue pals," snickers old George. "The doc said that leg of yours, Johnny, will git untwisted in time and if Stevie and you ain't both got concussion of the brain you'll pull through. But in my opinion, if you boys did have concussion of the brain, nobody would ever know the diff'rence."

At that moment in breezes a visitor, this here Lady Bulldogger from the Brazos, and One-ton he goes back to sleep ag'in. But Mrs. Bogard don't pay him no attention.

"Well, well, yuh pore boys," Wotta Womman booms out as she looks down at me and Stevie. "And so yuh're the Hooker boys, what's got a cow ranch. Got quite a few cows out on that ranch of yores, I hear."

"Not any more than the tax collector can ketch us admittin'," I states.

"Why be modest?" says Stevie. "We got a good-size outfit and we're goin' to own half this state some day."

"I think sometimes," she says, "maybe bulldoggin' ain't exactly a refined enough occupation for a lady like me. I think maybe it might be better if I was the wife of a rancher than a bulldogger like that big goof of a One-ton. I been married to two bulldoggers and one forest ranger, and all they done was get drunk and throw away their money. And so you boys got a ranch? Many a time and off, I thought I'd be a true helpmeet to a ranch. And when I look at you two boys, I'm sure of it."

"Huh?" I says, settin' up in bed.

"Lay down!" she orders, and gives me a push that squashes me flat on my pillow. "What you pore fellers need is the soft hand of a woman to stroke yore pore heads," she goes on. "Yuh're single, both of yuh, ain't yuh?"

"Yes, thank the Lord," mutters Stevie.

"A-hem," I says as a hint to Stevie. "In a way we are single and in another way we ain't. It'll take Stevie two years yet to git his final decree of divorce, and me five years."

"What decrees?" says Stevie, not tumblin'. "Why, you're out of your head, Johnny."

"Out of his head, is he?" she says while smilin' at me sour. "Tryin' to kid me, I reckon. It's a lucky thing you're in a hospital bed, cowboy. Which one of you boys got the biggest share in this ranch?"

"Stevie," I says quick. "He's practically the owner. I'm really only a hand out there."

"I'm coming out to see yuh boys while yuh're gittin' well," she tells us. "I got a friend out there on a ranch

near you, Mrs. Siggins, and I been thinkin' about payin' her a visit. I've always heard a lot about the two bachelor Hooker Bros.," she simpers, "and I'm so glad to meet yuh. Now you two be good and I'll come back in ten minutes and bring you some nice flowers. I'm goin' to nurse yuh so yuh'll git well."

"They're sunk," says old George as she goes out. "Bulldogged to the alter."

Me and Stevie looks at each other and we throws back the covers. Lucky our duds is in a locker in the corner, and we falls into 'em.

"Hey, crawl back into them sheets!" orders One-ton. "You two ain't in no shape to get up. You'll kill yourselfs."

"It takes more than a few horses and a bull trompin' around over us to keep Hooker Bros. in bed," I says firm. "That ranch of ours needs lookin' after."

"It does so," says Stevie as he takes off his nightshirt. "There's worse things than dyin' of concussion of the brain."

One-ton and old George both tries to stop us, but it ends with all of us pilin' in a car and headin' back for the ranch. We stop overnight and buy a li'l' white mule as medicine and go on next day.

"Well, we're through with that business," says Stevie next day as we heads around the last bend in the canyon leadin' to our shack. "This'll give that Lady Bulldogger from the Brazos a hint we don't care none for no ranch manager."

And we pull into the yard. There in front of the house sets a car and in it is a neighbor womman, Mrs. Siggins, and this here lady bulldogger, Belle Bogard.

"Hello!" she calls to us, plain peeved. "What did yuh boys mean rushin' away from the hospital and all? It looks like yuh're scairt of something. Aren't they the shyest things you ever saw?" she says to Mrs. Siggins. "I do believe I'll have to put hobbles on 'em," she goes on, sorta playful, but her eyes show she means it. "I ain't the kind that no men can make light with. My affections ain't to be tampered with. I ain't one of them love-'em-and-leave-'em wommen."

Me and Stevie sets there and stares at her sorta terrerfied, unable to say a word. One-ton, she don't pay no more attention to him than if he is a dried-up turnip peel on the doorstep.

"Yuh need a nurse, that's what yuh boys need," she says to us. "A nurse to see that yuh take care of yoreselfs and don't go gallivantin' around. And I'm goin' to be the nurse. Yuh two go right to bed; it's lucky I once took a course in nursin' before I took up bulldoggin'. I'm campin' right here. Drive that car on up to the house and unload yoreselfs."

"Wotta womman!" mutters old George as we moves ahead. "I never heard nothin' nobler than these Hooker Bros. in gittin' you out of trouble, One-ton, by offerin' theirselfs as her husband. Makin' what they call the Supreme Sacrifice for yuh."

"Shut up," I tells him. "Stevie," I goes on, "I been thinkin' this ranch ain't hardly big enough for a energetic up-and-comin' ambitious pair like us. S'posin' you take the whole ranch. I believe I'll take a trip somewhere—say South America."

"No, you don't," says Stevie. "United we stand; divided we fall. We'll see this thing through together and see that she don't marry either one of us. No tricks, now," Stevie warns me. "Don't try to saw her off on me to git out of danger yourself."

"I should say not," I agrees hearty, and we shakes hands on it, but I got the fingers of the other hand crossed. It won't make no diff'rence to my li'l' Bro. Stevie who he is married to. And in fact, a stern-handed feemale like this Belle Bogard, the Lady Bulldogger from the Brazos, might straighten Stevie out, take away his

light way of lookin' at life and stop his loafin' and drinkin'.

Still, I would not want to sackrifice him, even if it would do him good, except as a last resort. It would be too much like them cruel Russians do when they throw out one of the party when a sled full of 'em is chased by wolves.

"Yessir, I like them there Hooker Bros.," we hear Belle sayin' to Mrs. Siggins as we starts to git outa the car. "They're bashful, but I'll soon cure that. I can't decide which one I like most—that's my trouble."

"Neither of 'em would be home much," says Mrs. Siggins.

"My husbands was always home," Wotta Womman states. "If they wasn't, they knowed they'd git their necks broke. I never had no trouble except with my last one, the ornary li'l' coot. He was a forest ranger up in Oregon until he was trapped in a fire and got burnt up, leavin' no insurance. Jist the kind of trick that ornary li'l' feller would play on me."

Me and Stevie, with the stern eye of that feemale on us, start climbin' outa the car real slow.

"This here ranch could be fixed up real nice, Mrs. Siggins," we hears her go on. "It jist needs a manager to run it and to put these loafin' cowboys to work early ev'ry mornin'. No, this wouldn't make a bad ranch if I was in charge of it, keepin' these boys on the jump."

"Have you seen the house, ladies?" I asks 'em as I holds the door open. When they step inside the shack and go snoopin' around, I do it to the corrals in nothin' flat and I'm throwin' my saddle on a snoozin' old horse before he's got his eyes open. I'm cinchin' up when Stevie hightails in and starts saddlin' another horse.

"Goin' somewhere, was you, you renegade?" he hollers at me. "We'll jist go together."

"I was waitin' for you," I says as I hops my horse and sails down the canyon with Stevie alongside. "We got to hide out some place that's a way off from anywhere. That fire lookout cabin on Tejon Peak is the spot. It's on the other side of hell-and-gone and there's only one trail up the peak. Walt Nutter, he'll be camped up there now watchin' for early forest fires and we'll den up with him for a week or two."

"Maybe we better den up until Leap Year is over," says Stevie.

Don't git the wrong idee here: me and Stevie ain't scared none. No lady can throw the chill into Hooker Bros. But why butt head first into trouble when you can dodge it, that's our motto.

It's evenin' when we hit the trail goin' to the top of this Tejon Peak which sets up by itself, tall and rocky, with a fire lookout cabin. Our ranger friend, Walt Nutter, camps out in a cabin there every spring. Walt ain't home when we come so we turn our horses out into the range pasture and start supper on his stove with some of his grub.

As we finish eatin', wonderin' what's keepin' Walt after dark, a little sharp-faced stranger rides up and gits down and comes inside. He's wearin' the pine tree badge the U. S. Forest Service men wear.

"What you doin' in here? Didn't you read the signs to keep off of government property?" he asks.

"Cool down!" I tells him. "Walt Nutter is a good friend of ours. He's stopped with us plenty and we always do the same with him."

"My name's Guard, Bo Guard; and I've took Nutter's place as fire lookout up here," this little peppery bird snaps. "When I want company in my cabin, I'll let you know. Likewise that pasture out there is for the exclusive use of my horses, savvy? That's regulations."

Well, regulations is regulations, but after the times we busted our backs fightin' forest fires, we don't like the way this ornary li'l' wart talks to us. And me and Stevie jist start tellin'

him so, although in the most diplomatick way you ever saw, when the blame sidewinder grabs the gun outa his holster and points it at us.

"Vamos out of here!" he yowls. "This is government property and I'm orderin' yuh off. And take your horses out of that pasture and make it snappy."

He's easy got us as we come off without any guns in our hurry to git away from that Wotta Womman Belle Bogard, the Lady Bulldogger from the Brazos. He's about the meanest hombre we ever saw, and a new sort for the Forest Service, where the men is all square-shooters and friendly.

"All right," I states to him. "We'll camp somewhere else on this peak tonight."

"Not without a permit, you won't," he states. "You'll git off here. I don't want no fires around here with this brush as dry as it is. And I want to be alone, savvy?"

"You'll be plumb alone, only you'll be in a place where you won't know it, if you fool around much with Hooker Bros.," I tell him, and we leave there and go to git our horses outa the pasture.

"If he'd said much more to us, I would of hit him in the snoot in spite of his gun," says my li'l' Bro. Stevie.

"Yes, that's the way I felt, too," I says sarcastic.

We git our horses cornered in the pasture finally and saddle up. About this time we see a red glow in the sky on the south slope of the peak where the one trail comes up. There's a storm rumblin' not far off and we guess lightnin' has started a blaze. As we're lookin' at it, that ranger runs across.

"There's a fire started below," he states. "Come on, you men. I want you to go along and help put it out."

"We couldn't do it," we says. "That fire's on government property and we wouldn't dare touch it."

"You come with me," he growls ugly, and he shoves that six-shooter our way ag'in. But this time Stevie, who's mighty quick, he steps in to grab that ranger's arm and I come in to help twist the gun away from him.

"I'll jail you for this," he threatens as he rides off, foamin' at the mouth, to put out that fire. Below the blaze is spreadin' fast, on a brushy canyon side as we locate it. It won't do no harm there, jist burn off a lot o' brush which'll be a help to the grass. What bothers us is that fire is burnin' right along the trail and we can't git off the peak until mornin'.

"Since we can't git down and this ranger is gone, we might as well go back to his cabin and make ourselfs at home," I remarks. And we does it, settin' in the door smokin' and watchin' the fire, and feelin' good over how that ranger is havin' to work.

As we're still settin', hoofs drum our way up the trail. As the rider comes near us, he gives a yell. Me and Stevie bounce to our feet: it's that calliope voice of Belle Bogard.

"And here we are ag'in," states the Lady Bulldogger from the Brazos. "I asked Mrs. Siggins what was the most likely hidin' place yuh boys would pick out in this country and she said the fire lookout cabin on Tejon Mountain. I come near gettin' caught in that fire," she says as if she blames us for it. "It chased me right along the trail. I'd hate to have it get around the country you two boys was dodgin' me. Yuh two boys better not try leavin' me ag'in; there's a limit to my patience."

"We ain't dodgin' you, Mrs. Bogard," I assures her, diplomatick as usual. "We jist had a business trip up here and we was about to head back home to see you when this fire come up and blocked the trail back."

"And that trail bein' blocked means we'll have to stay here until mornin', now," says Stevie.

"You sure there's no other way down off this mountain?" she asks

sharp. "And we three is all alone up here?"

"Yes, the ranger is down fightin' the fire," says Stevie. "You must of jist missed him on the trail."

"And we're all stuck up here for the night," she says, kinda reflectin'. "Well, well," she continues cheerful. "I think I will curl up all comfy in the bed in that cabin. You boys sleep out under the trees somewhere. Sleepin' in there'll be just like old times before I lost my third husband in that forest fire up in Oregon."

She seems real cheerful, Mrs. Bogard does, as she goes inside and perceeds to make herself at home. Too cheerful, in fact, and I take Stevie aside to talk things over.

"We're in a jackpot," I states.

"How?" asks Stevie. "What's to keep us from sneakin' outa here early in the mornin'?"

"That won't do us no good," I points out. "We got only one chance —to git outa here right away. But we can't ride down through no fire."

"Why not take our lass' ropes and try to git down those cliffs afoot?" suggests Stevie, contributin' the only practicable suggestion he's made since this whole trouble started.

We never cared much for ramblin' around a mountain afoot either daytimes or nights, but when it's a choice of havin' our necks broke by a Lady Bulldogger for comin' home too late, or gittin' 'em busted on a cliff, Hooker Bros. votes to take a chance on the cliff. By tyin' our ropes when necessary to some stunty cedars, we slide down part of the way and fall down the rest.

Jist before we reach the bottom, while Stevie is sleddin' down a steep slope on the seat of his pants, he loosens a li'l' rock what bounces down on my head. That knocks me off a ledge, and after I land in a tree about ten foot below, I'm knocked out. But it's worth it, for as I come to, a couple things I hadn't thought of before flashes into my head.

"Hey, Knothead, what did that sidewinder of a forest ranger tell us his name was?" I asks.

"Guard," says Stevie. "Bo Guard, he said."

"And what did Belle tells us happened to the litle tripe of a Bill Bogard, her forest ranger husband back up in Oregon?"

"He was burned to death in a forest fire," says Stevie.

"S'posed to of been burned," I adds. "That was a slick way of gittin' away from her, but it won't do him no good. And he came down here and changed his name to Bo Guard and got work in his line ag'in. Well, well," I says real cheerful.

"Well, well," says Stevie, likewise real cheerful.

We wanders acrost to where that fire is burnin', huntin' for that jasper of a ranger. Before we git there the storm slides over and rains enough to put out the blazes. When we find this Bo Guard, he's gittin' ready to go up the trail to his cabin.

"So you come down finally, did you?" he growls at us. "If you ever come around that cabin ag'in, I'll sure settle you two."

"Forget it," I begs him. "Don't let there be no hard feelin's between us, Mister Bo Guard."

"Sure, let bygones be bygones, Mister Bo Guard," says Stevie. "Shake hands with us, old pal."

And by the use of a li'l' force we make him give us his paw.

"And," I says to him at partin', "if you ever want any help from Hooker Bros. on puttin' out a fire, let us know. We like to cooperate with the U. S. Forest Service in any way we can. Yessir. You've sure done a lot for us, Mister Bo Guard. And you're goin' to soon know why."

"Adios, Mister Bo Guard!" chortles my li'l' brother Stevie. And we stands and watches that hombre make tracks up the trail back to the cabin where snoozes the Lady Bulldogger from the Brazos.

DAREDEVIL TRAIL

By Forbes Parkhill

Ginger blew into the Boreas Basin heeled for trouble. But it got him how a fellow could keep lead hot at thirty below zero. It didn't take him long to find out, though. . . . Besides the blizzard, there was one roaring range feud, a battle royal between fighting men.

CHAPTER I

Blood and Snow

OUT of the northwest came the March blizzard, shrieking across the jagged peaks of the Boreas range, howling mournfully through the gorges, piling the powdery snow in head-high drifts, breaking from the foothills at last to go rampaging across the far-flung prairies like some ghost-white devastating legion of destruction.

Into the teeth of the icy blast pressed a lone horseman, head lowered against the stinging lash of the storm. "Ginger" Fortune, red-headed gunslinger, tumbleweeder and top-hand cowpuncher, was heading for the heart of the Boreas country in response to a mystifying summons from the stepfather whom he had never seen—a summons which promised peril and

profit, danger and difficulties, trouble and triumph, and the thrill of adventure.

Down in the prairie country, where the whistling wind had swept the swells clean of snow, leaving mile-long drifts in the shallow dips, he had passed great numbers of cattle. Sometimes they were drifting before the storm like tumbleweeds, but more often they were washed up against some drift fence which had halted their progress, heads down, almost motionless, rumped up with tails to the wind, broad red backs silvered over with snow.

But now that the foothills were behind him and he was nearing his goal, he saw no more living critters. Now and then he passed a pile of bleached bones. Once the partly-devoured carcasses of a cow and calf told their mute story of the depredations of timber wolves. It was bleak, desolate and forbidding, this Boreas range—vastly different than the country whence he had come, where already the grass should be showing green on the south slopes.

"For why should Branson Trent figger he had such a swell proposition, in such a God-forsaken country as this?" he asked himself through lips that were blue with cold. Trent was Ginger's stepfather, whose letter, two weeks delayed, had brought him hurrying northward, heeled for trouble and vastly mystified.

He jerked the brim of his Stetson lower to shield his face, already red from the stinging bombardment of tiny flakes which cut like sand. His bandanna was bound round his head and knotted under his chin to protect his ears. He wore a short, sheep-lined coat and slick bullskin chaps, although, in this country, hairy goatskin chaps would have been warmer. He was young and wiry, but looked exactly like any run-of-the-herd cowhand.

Only when his hat was off and his head raised could Ginger be spotted as a "marker"—a critter with markings which distinguished it from the rest of the herd. Fiery and rebellious red hair bespoke a fiery and rebellious nature. Keen blue eyes, well set and expressive, revealed a high order of intelligence. His jaw, lean and firm, told of a rare degree of courage.

He had been christened Frank, after the father who died when he was eight—but who ever heard of a redhead called by his real handle? "Ginger" he had been called since his carrot-colored thatch had been long enough to comb and he had tried to knock the stuffing out of a kit twice his size. And "Ginger" he would remain until that brick top turned white with age—if he lived that long. For he was a sure-shot bull's-eyer and a whiz on the draw, and gents that live by the gun, so they say, seldom enjoy a ripe old age.

When, at the age of twelve, he had learned that his mother was about to remarry, he had promptly flagged his kite. He had been tumbleweeding ever since, drifting here and there and yonder and back again, acquiring a rep as an A-1 cowhand with an uncanny skill with a six-gun, but not much else, except an armload of fun.

His mother had died two years ago, but he had not returned for the funeral because it had taken six weeks for the letter of notification to catch up with him in his wanderings. The letter he had just received from his stepfather had done somewhat better, overtaking him two weeks after it had been mailed. And that letter had him guessing for fair. He had never seen his stepfather. For all he knew, Trent might be a plumb good scout. But Ginger just naturally hadn't taken to the stepfather idea.

Trent had guessed as much, for he came right out and said so in that puzzling letter. Said Ginger's mother had left a little money when she died, but it was all tied up with Trent's in their ranch property. Said he didn't feel this money was his, by rights,

and had told her, unasked, that he was of a mind to see that her son got it when he, Trent, kicked off. All of which sounded to Ginger plumb white, like the ideas of a regular feller. But Ginger wasn't asking any favors. He had two good arms and a red head and a six-gun, and he could make his own way in the world.

Trent had written that he had sold the old home place and had just bought a new spread, called the Tin-cup, in the Boreas country, but that it had taken all his capital. A good proposition, picked up dirt cheap, because the former owner had been murdered, and the widow was sacrificing to sell. He had written:

> Now seeing as I used your ma's money along with my own to buy this place, you stand to step into a half-interest some day. But I figured you would maybe like to learn the ropes so as to be ready, so I am asking you to come now, if you want to.
>
> Maybe, Frank, you will not like me. And maybe I will not like you. And maybe we will both like each other and hit it off fine together. If such is the case, well, I have not got any heirs at all, and I am getting along in years. Some day you might stand to get the whole kaboodle instead of just a half. But you can count on that half when I kick off, win, lose or draw, whether I like you or do not like you, because I would not cheat you out of your ma's money.

When Ginger had read that far, he had thought it sounded too good. Nobody had ever offered to dump half a ranch into his lap before. He had thought that there must be a catch in it. And, apparently, there was. For Trent's letter went on:

> I have heard you have been middling wild, Frank, and are known as a hellion with a gun. Well, Frank, that is just the kind of a gent I need in this business. If you are as hardware-handy as they say you are, me and you stand to make a pile of jack together. Let me know right away if you can come. But if you are scared of hot lead, better stay where you are, because that way you stand to get your half-share when I kick off, and without taking any risk.

That crack had sounded to Ginger as though his stepfather were turning a crooked trick. Why did he need the services of a gunman? Had he gone plumb bronc, turned rustler, stick-up, or what?

Asking a redhead if he were scared of hot lead was like waving a red bandanna under the nose of a Brahma steer. It was a challenge—but Ginger was too shrewd to be lured blindfolded into a crooked game. True, he was a gun-slinger and had been middling wild, but he'd always played the game on the level. He didn't propose to be tricked into hitching up with a crooked layout.

"Even if he's on the square," he had told himself, "for why should I lick his boots to get me his money? I won't turn down the share that's mine, by right, if it's tossed at my head. But I'll be doggoned if I lick anybody's boots, or go outlaw even to win me a pot of money!"

He had milled it over in his mind for quite a spell before deciding whether to accept his stepfather's invitation. And in the end it was an outside factor that turned the scales. A year ago, while riding for an outfit down on the Maxwell grant, he had taken quite a shine to the schoolmarm, Rita Andrix. The illness of her father had forced her to give up her school and return to her home in the Boreas country at the end of the term. His stepfather's letter gave Ginger an excuse to drop in and say "howdy" to the girl who had given up primer-wrangling to 'tend her ailing dad.

"I'll just ease myself in on the Boreas country and find out what's what 'fore I do anything," he decided. "I won't rush into anything with blinders on. If Trent turns out to be a four-cornered gent, I may sling in with him, if his layout's on the level."

But Ginger was halfway to the Boreas country before it occurred to him that it might be well to let his stepfather know he was coming. He sent him a penciled note, but he knew

that if the Tincup Ranch sent to town for mail only once a week, as was the case with many isolated spreads, he might arrive before his letter reached Trent.

All this was passing through his mind as he shoved his buckskin through the blizzard toward the Tincup. He had been told that if he followed the banks of the Big Johnson River upstream, he would reach the Tincup shortly after passing through a narrow gorge. Although he couldn't see a hundred yards through the swirling snow, it was no trick at all to follow the river. The stream was rimmed with ice, yet the swift water in the main channel defied the lowering temperature.

"Reckon I'm 'most nearly there," he told himself as he peered into the churning whiteness ahead. He was forced to shield his eyes with his hand. "The cliffs are closing in on me. This must be one end of the gorge."

As he looked, a moving gray shadow resolved itself out of the whiteness. In a moment he saw that it was a horseman, heading down the trail toward him.

"First human I've seed sinct morning," he said. "I'll ask him how far the Tincup is from me."

The face of the approaching rider was covered with a blue bandanna, up to the eyes. This might be a mask, but in such weather it was far more likely to be merely a means of protection against the wind-whipped snowflakes. Nevertheless, Ginger, as he reined in to await the fellow's approach, instinctively loosened the front of his sheepskin coat so, if need be, he could have ready access to his six-gun.

Ginger bore a bullet scar on one leg as a reminder of the wisdom of such a precaution. Once he had been caught short because he had been wearing a slicker which covered his gun and delayed his draw. Ever since he had stopped that bullet, he had always, when wearing any garment which covered his holster, shifted his cartridge belt so that the six-gun hung in front, easily accessible.

But the stranger, when he "raised" Ginger, immediately jerked the kerchief down from his face, which was a gesture of friendship.

"Hi-ya, fella," he called as he reined in to "pass a word," as was the custom. "Looks like we might have a little snow, huh?"

"Maybeso," grinned Ginger, studying the stranger's face intently. It was a thoroughly evil face, swarthy and gross, with shifty black eyes. "This is the funniest country ever I see, where it blizzes when the sun's blazing hot at home."

"Yo're a stranger hereabouts, then?"

"Uh-huh. Heading for the Tincup Ranch. Am I trailing true?"

"Yep. Foller the river. But if yo're looking for a job of work, I can tell yuh that at this time of year there ain't a—"

"Thanks. I ain't exactly looking for work. Just paying a sorta social visit to my kinfolk. Y'see, the owner of the Tincup is my stepdaddy, and—"

"The hell yuh say!" exploded the stranger. "Man, yuh've done talked yoreself dead!"

At Ginger's declaration the fellow had whipped forth a six-gun seemingly from nowhere. Before he had ceased speaking his gun was blazing at the redhead at almost pointblank range. The reports sounded strangely flat and muffled because of the storm. . . .

Ginger was taken utterly by surprise by this amazingly unexpected attack. The fellow's Colt was leaping upward before his gloved hand had even started for his gun. He knew he couldn't beat him to the first shot. So he flung himself violently sidewise from the saddle.

Three shots blazed from the stranger's weapon before Ginger struck the snow. The redhead's forty-five was drawn and ready for use the instant he hit bottom. His startled buckskin,

which momentarily had hidden him from his foe, instantly bolted.

Ginger didn't know what it was all about. He knew only that this hard-mugged stranger was trying to kill him, and that his next shot probably would turn the trick. It was a case of kill or be killed. Ginger shot from a kneeling position. He did not miss, even though he was facing the blinding lash of the storm.

CHAPTER II

Death Rides the Blizzard

THE stranger went limp just as his own horse bolted. He slumped sidewise, and a moment later thumped heavily in the snow-covered trail. He lay in a twisted heap, face down. Blood stained the snow beneath his head. The back of his skull had been torn away by Ginger's bullet as it emerged. It had caught him squarely between the eyes. At such a range Ginger never missed.

"Well, I'll be piled!" exclaimed the dumbfounded Ginger as he rose to his feet and started toward the body. The amazing attack with its fatal ending had happened so swiftly that Ginger was still partly bewildered. This man whom he had never seen, apparently for no reason at all, had pulled a gun on him and had tried to kill him. It had taken no more than a matter of seconds. An impulse of self-preservation had forced Ginger to kill in order to keep from being killed. Now the snow was stained with the stranger's life blood as Ginger, completely mystified, was advancing toward the slumped body.

"Well, I'll be piled!" he repeated. "For why did he try to kill me? Who is he? For why—"

The mournful howling of the wind offered no solution. Already little, wispy curlicues of snow were swirling about the stranger's body. Ginger became aware of the muffled *clop-clop* of hoofs and spun about to face the sound, gun ready for instant use.

Down the trail came another rider at an easy lope. Both arms were raised high above his head. He boomed out:

"Put up that cannon, stranger. The daggoned thing might go off. I seen it all. Yo're in the right. He got what was coming to him."

But Ginger, still wary, did not put up his gun. The rider, still holding his arms aloft as a sign of peace, dismounted by swinging his off leg over the horn and dropping to the ground. Ginger saw that his legs were incredibly bowed, making him appear almost a dwarf. His nose was tremendous and crimson with cold. His mouth was spread in a broad grin. His ears were covered with a black stocking-leg. He was as pretty as a picture—a picture of a mud fence in a rainstorm—and his booming voice was oddly at variance with his stunted stature.

"Who are you?" demanded Ginger warily. The instant after the shooting, it had struck the redhead that he was in a pretty jam and would have a tough time explaining. But with the appearance of this waddling runt, who claimed to have witnessed the clash, it occurred to him that here was the man who could get him out of the hole by testifying that he had shot in self-defense. It would pay to have this gent as a friend rather than as an enemy.

"Me?" boomed the fellow. "Why, I'm Wad Tansy—which is short for Waddle, in case yuh ain't guessed it. I may be so short my legs don't touch the ground, but I'm a ring-tailed hellion from Powder River and dynamite when riled! At present I'm riding for the Six Slash Six, and a better outfit never was born!"

Ginger grinned, lowering his gun. "Who is that cuss I just bulleted? A stick-up, or something?"

"Barring one, that's the orneriest polecat that ever cluttered up the universe with his carcass," foghorned Wad. "He's the owner of the Tincup—name's Branson Trent."

Branson Trent! Ginger gasped, and then bit his gasp off in the middle in an effort to conceal the shock of this revelation.

"Goshamighty!" he exclaimed, but to himself, "I've done shot my own stepfather!"

The first thought that flashed upon him was that Trent was a crook, just as he'd thought from the letter. His instinctive dislike for his stepfather seemed to be confirmed. But why, in the name of the fourteen million wildcats, had Trent tried to murder him in cold blood after inviting him so cordially to visit the Tincup? His mind was all of a muddle as he groped for a reasonable explanation.

"Yuh look a mite upsot," boomed Wad. "Don't let a little thing like this faze yuh. Yuh've done the world a service in turning this here 'scallion into cold meat. Only thing I'm sore about is that yuh beat me to it. I was gunning for him my own self, and I'm a rip-snorter from Powder River, *I* am!"

"He wisht it on hisself," said Ginger. "He shot first. I had to let him have it, or else get killed myself. What mysticates me is, for why should he pick on *me?*"

"Pure cussedness, I reckon," said Wad. "He didn't happen to mention why he craved yore pelt, did he? I saw him shoot first, but the wind was yowling like a timber wolf with the bellyache, and I couldn't hear what was said."

"Nope, he forgot to mention for why he aimed to kill me."

"Now, that's right curious. Yuh never had no fuss with him before?"

"Never saw him in my life," asserted Ginger. "I never been within two hundred miles of here, up to now."

"Well, then," bellowed Wad, "all I got to say is, yuh got a helluva nerve to come here, a stranger, and cheat me outa the chanct to kill the next to my best enemy! Yuh make me plumb mad, and when Wad Tansy gets mad, look out a little bit! I'm five foot nothing, and so short my feet don't touch the ground, but I come from Powder River and I'm a curly catawampus!"

In a sudden fit of rage he snatched hit hat from his head and flung it on the ground. Ginger, puzzled, thought that the spraddle-legged coot had gone plumb loco. But Wad's rage passed as quickly as it had come.

"I reckon I can't hold it agin yuh," he boomed. "Yo're a stranger and didn't know no better. Yuh didn't know Trent was my meat. I'll let it pass this time. But don't let it happen again, 'cause I'm Wad Tansy from Powder River, where they eat their meat raw!" He picked up his hat, knocked the snow off by slapping it against his leg, and jammed it on his head.

"All right," promised Ginger with a faint grin, "I won't kill him no more. And now, Wad, I'm asking yuh to ride to town with me and tell the sheriff that this feller died a natural death by drawing first."

"What?" exclaimed Wad in astonishment, staring at Ginger open-mouthed. "Why, I never *hear* of such daggoned foolishness! Tell the sheriff you killed Trent? Say, if yo're so anxious to get hanged, I'll lend yuh my rope and yuh can hang yoreself and save us both a trip to town!"

"The law can't touch a man for shooting in self-defense," insisted Ginger.

"No, the law can't. But Crosho Griet and his gang of skullduggers can—and will! What I mean, Sheriff Stark is on the square, and if I tell him 'twas self-defense, he'll turn yuh free. 'Cause he knows that Wad Tansy may be so short his feet don't touch the ground, but his word is six foot three. I'm from Powder River, and my word is as good as my bond, whatever that is!"

"Well, then—"

"Wait! I'll square things with the law for yuh. But that ain't the half

of it. When Crosho Griet and his Rocking H gun-slingers find out who killed their man, Trent, they won't ask whether 'twas done in self-defense. Fella, it's daggoned cold weather to be hanging by yore neck from a cottonwood tree. Take a tip from a Powder River buckaroo who knows his way around, and don't say nothing to nobody about this gun fuss. What nobody don't know won't hurt 'em."

"But I haven't anything to hide, Wad. I'm not a—"

"I know. I'd be six foot tall if twelve inches of each leg wasn't folded under in a curve. You'll be seven foot tall if yore neck gets rope-stretched a foot, but yuh won't be able to crow over it, or tell folks it was a slight mistake 'cause yuh'd shot in self-defense. Get wise, buddy. Hobble yore tongue, and I'll do the same with mine. When they find Trent, they'll figger he died a natural death."

"What? With half his skull blowed away? For why—"

"What I mean by natural death is, they'll think he's just one more victim of the feud, and let it go at that. Which is the way most folks kick off hereabouts, and nobody thinks much about it, and nobody does anything about it except wait for a chanct to pot somebody on t'other side. Being as yo're a stranger, nobody will suspicion yuh if you keep yore lip buttoned. Take it from Wad Tansy, who may be knee-high to a hoptoad, but who's two-thirds brains and the other four-fifths guts!"

"Maybe yo're right," ventured Ginger doubtfully. "But—"

"They's one thing shore," interrupted Wad hastily. "And that is, if we stick around here, we're both shore to get salivated by some Rocking H Winchester lead. Like as not the Tincup rifle-wranglers guarding the gorge heard them shots, and if they did they'll be swarming down on us in two snaps of a piggin' string. Thing for us to do is to make some tracks for the blizzard to blow away."

If what Wad said was true, Ginger could see no objection to doing a little wind-splitting. He didn't crave to be burned down by friends of the dead man. He was still undecided as to whether his better course would be to notify the sheriff immediately. But this seemed to be a plumb good place to get away from. So he made for his horse, which had halted a few yards distant and was standing on three legs, head down, tail to the wind.

"Tell yuh what I'll do," announced Wad, when they were mounted and heading through the storm side by side. "I'll take yuh to the county seat, which is Johnson City, and I'll back up yore story if yo're still crazy enough to tell it to the sheriff, or anybody else. But if yuh'll take a tip from a gent from Powder River, where everybody is smart 'cause they kill all the fools, yuh'll let me get yuh a job of work with the Six Slash Six. The skipper, which is the boss of the spread, is in town, and he'll be plumb glad to hire up a gent which is as handy with a hogleg as you, fella. By the bye, what's yore name?"

In reply, Ginger removed his hat. Wad glanced at his hair. "Red?" he asked. Ginger shook his head. "Then it's Ginger," asserted Wad. "Them's the only two names possible for you?"

"Yuh've got me all in a muddle, Wad," said Ginger as they rode. "Yuh speak of the Rocking H and the Tincup and the Six Slash Six and a feud. I wisht yuh'd tell me what's which, and for why."

"Okay, Ginger. This is the Tincup range we're loping acrost now. It straddles the river, which is called the Big Johnson. Upstream, on the south bank, lays the Six Slash Six; and upstream, on the north bank, is the Rocking H. They say the Powder River is a mile wide and an inch deep, but the Big Johnson is a mile deep, and so swift it makes yuh dizzy to

look at it. . . . Crosho Griet and his son, Jim-Bob, owns the Rocking H, and Crosho's so hard he can bust granite with his fist. He dassn't spit for fear of starting a prairie fire. He's so tough bullets bounce off'n his hide. They say a hoss kicked him onct and broke its leg on him. I said Trent was the orneriest polecat in the universe, barring one, and Crosho Griet is that one. I ain't as ornery as him, but I'm just as tough, 'cause I'm a ring-tailed runt from Powder River, and I'm so short my feet don't touch the ground!"

Ginger grinned. "I take it yuh don't like Crosho, Wad."

"No, nor his son Jim-Bob. Jim-Bob is so crooked he walks like a rattlesnake. He ain't got a millionth of the guts that Crosho has got, but he's just as dangersome. They been feuding with the Six Slash Six for quite a spell. The feud started over a lawsuit for water rights, which the Skipper won. The Skipper's my boss, and he's a he-gent from hellangone, and so plumb square he can't roll downhill. He was a rip-roarer in his day, but even if he's aging and stove-up, he ain't afraid of nothing on two legs, and he'd spit in the devil's face and throw a half-hitch in his tail. I'm a wolfy wombat from Powder River and my feet don't touch the ground, but I never rode for a sweller boss than the Skipper."

Ginger nodded. "But how about Trent and the Tincup?"

"I'm coming to that. Crosho Griet says the Boreas country wasn't big enough to hold him and the Skipper, and the Skipper says that was the first thing he'd ever agreed on with Crosho. The feller who used to own the Tincup caught the Rocking H sleepering some of his calf-critters, so he sorta strung along with the Skipper. Result was, he found himself dead 'bout a month ago. That's where Trent come in."

"Yuh mean," asked Ginger, "that Trent killed him?"

"Nope—though I wouldn't of put it past him. Trent bought the Tincup from his widow. But Trent was Crosho Griet's man, and right away everybody seen there was a new deal, with the Skipper cold-decked. Crosho had cooked up the slickest game of freeze-out yuh ever seen, with the Skipper slated for the skids. Which brings us down to the weather."

"Speaking of the weather," put in Ginger, "don't spring never come in this country?"

"I dunno," answered Wad. "I only been here four years. But the weather played right into Crosho's hands. This has been the toughest winter since Adam was a kid. It started blizzing in October, and they forgot to turn it off. It ain't the weather's fault that every head of stock on the Boreas range ain't been winter-killed."

CHAPTER III

Crackling Colts

"AIN'T this a winter-feed country?" asked Ginger. "Don't they figger on feeding their stock?"

"Yeah, but not forever. They found 'emselves with all their hay et up and the range snowed under. So the Rocking H and the Tincup shoved the critters down to the prairie country, where the wind has swept a heap of the range clean of snow. That's why yuh don't see no whitefaces hereabouts. They'll winter through down on the flats, all right."

"Why didn't the Six Slash Six do the same?"

"'Cause Crosho wouldn't let 'em. The only way they could get to the grass country was by driving through that gorge back yonder. The Tincup controls the gorge—with gunmen. And Crosho controls the Tincup, through Trent. He's got the Skipper with his back to the wall, and he aims to keep crowding him till he shoves him clean through the wall."

Ginger nodded. "Ain't there any

other way he can get his critters out?"

"If they'd all spout wings they could get out, but not no other way. The Six Slash Six is hemmed in by mountains on two sides and by the impassable Big Johnson on t'other. His winter feed is all et up. He's got to get through that gorge or go bust. We tried it onct, and all we got was a red-hot Winchestering."

The Wad continued. "But that ain't the half of it, Ginger. The Skipper's got a note due at the bank in a week. Any other time he could get it renewed, easy. But the bank won't renew a note on the security of a range full of bleached bones. They told him that if he'd get his critters down to the prairie where it was certain they'd pull through, the note would be renewed. Crosho has offered to buy him out for just enough to meet his note. If he sells, he'll be flat bust, and Crosho will control the entire basin. If he don't sell, his critters will all starve and he'll be bust anyways. I'm from Powder River, and I'm as brainy as I am small, but even *I* can't figger him outa the mess!"

But Ginger was more concerned, at that particular moment, about his own mess. They had swung round in a semicircle to reach Johnson City. The more he milled it over, the more he became convinced that Wad's advice was sound. He hadn't told Wad that it was his own stepfather he had shot, and he didn't intend to tell him, or anyone else.

Had it been anyone else who had fallen before his gun, his logical course would have been to notify the law, particularly as he had a witness to swear that he had shot in self-defense. But as soon as the sheriff learned he was Trent's stepson and heir, that would put another face on the matter, for it would provide a plausible motive for murder. On the other hand, this trick of fate seemingly had barred him forever from claiming his birthright. How could he claim part of the estate of the man he had killed?

"I reckon, Wad," he said to his companion as they rode into the wind-swept street of the little town, "that yore hunch is best. I figger to lay low and wait till I see what happens. In the end I may tell that I killed Trent, but meanwhile, if yuh'd just as soon say nothing about it, I'll let things ride. I got a special reason for waiting."

They left their ponies at the tie-rail in front of the Chink restaurant, directly across the street from two-story frame Pride of the Rockies Hotel.

"I'm only five foot nothing, and my feet don't even touch the ground," said Wad as they seated themselves on stools at the lunch counter, "but I betcha I can out-eat any six-footer this side of Powder River!" He knocked the snow from his hat and called to the waitress: "Honey, bring me a hogshead of coffee, six barbecued beefs, a wagonload of potatoes and all the pies in the joint, 'cause I'm Wad Tansy from where men are *men,* and I need plenty of elbow room when I start to wolf down my feed!"

After they had fed themselves, Wad started out to find the boss of the Six Slash Six, promising to meet Ginger later at the Last Chance. Ginger, chewing a toothpick, lingered in the lunchroom, standing with his back to the stove and staring out the front windows upon the bleak and almost deserted street. He was ill at ease, wondering whether, after all, he was pursuing the wisest course in withholding from the sheriff his story of the killing of Branson Trent.

A group of horsemen resolved themselves from the misty swirl of the blizzard, looking like wraiths as they trotted down the street as silently as shadows, their ponies' hoofbeats muffled by the snow. A red-faced man with a short white mustache, clad in a long cowhide storm coat, cured

with the hair on, emerged from the door of the Pride of the Rockies and, head down as he faced the blizzard, started afoot down the street toward the post office.

Ginger saw the leader of the horsemen draw rein suddenly as he spotted the man in the cowhide coat. As the others drew abreast of him he spoke to them, indicating the walking man with a jerk of his head. Ginger could not, of course, hear what was said, but he saw two of the riders reach for their holsters. The leader squelched their move with an imperative gesture and began talking rapidly, indicating the man in the cowskin coat with quick little jerks of his head. Then he swung his horse about and headed straight for the pedestrian, his followers spreading out fanwise behind him.

"For why they ganging up on the old gent?" Ginger asked himself curiously. "Something's coming off. Reckon I'll amble out and have a looksee."

But the factor which really sent the redhead sashaying out into the street, his sheepskin coat open at the front so that it would not interfere with a sudden play for his gun, was the expression of black hatred on the face of the leader of the horsemen. More than anything else, it promised tough sledding for the white-whiskered gent in the greatcoat.

The leader was a man of middle age, splendidly built, with immense shoulders and a massive head. His face was unforgettable and set him off as a leader of men—hard, unscrupulous, dominating. Heavy black brows sloped sharply down and outward. Eyes, black and piercing, sloped too. Deep creases sloped from the corners of his nose to the down-drawn corners of his wide mouth. His jaw was heavy, hard, determined.

"He ain't exactly figgering on greeting Whiskers with a sweet kiss," surmised Ginger as he sauntered out into the storm and angled over toward the group. "He's plumb hard, that hombre. If he had a grudge agin me, I'd hate to meet him in a dark alley!"

The man in the greatcoat, head down as he bucked the blizzard, failed to see the others until they had closed in on him in a semicircle, imprisoning him against the wall of a livery stable. The leader of the horsemen leaped from the saddle and barred the other' path.

"Just a second, Skipper!" he barked in a crackling, commanding voice. "I got omething to say to yuh!"

The Skipper straightened up, glared defiantly, and snapped:

"Spit it out, Crosho! Speak yore piece. But cut it short, 'cause I'm in a hurry to get my mail."

Ginger's brows lifted and he whistled between his teeth. "So these gents are the boss of the Six Slash Six and Crosho Griet, the boss feud-wranglers of Boreas Basin!" he exclaimed. "Looks like I stepped smack into something! I wonder which is Crosho's son, that Wad done told about?"

Crosho's son, Jim-Bob, was unmistakable, for he was a pocket edition of his father. Not so tall, not so broad, not so commanding in appearance, but with the same sloping brows, eyes, and mouth. His eyes were black and piercing, too, but shifty rather than steady, like his sire's. But where Crosho's jaw was heavy and hard, Jim-Bob's was weak and receding. Ginger saw him slip from the saddle and ease his gun from its holster, holding it behind him where the Skipper couldn't see it.

"Skipper," barked Crosho Griet, "yuh turned yore last crooked trick when yuh dry-gulched Bronson Trent!"

The owner of the Six Slash Six started. "Talk sense, Crosho," he snapped. "I don't savvy what yo're blowing off about."

"Yuh don't?" Crosho sneered. "*Ain't* yuh innocent, though! It's all news to yuh that Trent was murdered down below the gorge, ain't it?"

The Skipper's amazement showed plainly in his expression. "If Trent's killed, Crosho, somebody deserves a medal," he snapped. "So yo're trying to hang it onto me, are yuh?"

"If yuh didn't kill him yoreself, Skipper," barked Crosho, "yuh know who did! If 'twasn't you, 'twas some of yore cowardly Six Slash Six riders! Either way, yo're behind it, and yo're the one that's going to pay for it!"

"Yeah?" sneered the Skipper, without troubling to deny the charge. "And what yuh going to do about it?" To Ginger, it seemed as if the owner of the Six Slash Six was convinced that one of his riders *had* slain Trent. Ginger recalled that Wad had admitted that he was gunning for him.

Crosho glanced about quickly and his gaze fell on Ginger, lounging against an awning pole across the street. Except for Ginger and the quarreling group the street was deserted.

"I'm going to give yuh time to unbutton yore coat and go for yore gun," Crosho snarled at his enemy, "and then me and you are going to shoot it out!"

The Skipper laughed harshly, but made no play for a gun. "Yo're almighty slick, Crosho—I got to give it to yuh. Yuh've seen that they's one impartial witness. If I start unbuttoning my coat to get my gun, what happens? You and the whole kit of yore gunmen cut loose and riddle me down. And, in the eyes of the law, yuh'll have a perfect 'out,' 'cause I'd of made the first play to draw! Nope, Crosho, I ain't *that* anxious to suicide myself! Send yore gunmen packing, and I'll shoot it out with you, alone, any time or place yuh pick! If yo're sot on murdering me now, I'll make yuh do it in cold blood, with a witness to swear to the facts!"

Ginger grinned. "The old boy's got guts," he told himself. "He's called Crosho's turn. Crosho's either got to back down or commit murder! As I size him up, he's got too much sense to lay himself open to a charge of—"

He broke off suddenly as Crosho's son, with a cry of rage, whipped his gun out from behind him. Crosho, apparently, was too shrewd to be led into an act which might possibly leave him open to a charge of murder. But Jim-Bob had less balance, less horse-sense. Hatred had banished his judgment. Plainly, he was prepared to shoot the Skipper down in cold blood, regardless of consequences.

Ginger had no quarrel with Crosho. He had no reason to take sides in a feud which apparently concerned him not in the least. But. . . .

He had killed Trent. He could not stand idly by and see the Skipper, or any other man, shot down for an act for which he himself was responsible. His gun leaped from its holster with speed enough to have shaded a bolt of lightning.

Jim-Bob presented a broadside target. Ginger's gun roared. Jim-Bob's weapon went spinning from his tingling fingers. . . .

An instant of startled silence followed as all eyes turned toward the redhead. Then hell cut loose with a bang. The street, which had known only the shrieking of the storm, became an inferno of blazing guns and shouting men.

Every doorway began to erupt yelling, excited figures. They saw a group of horsemen banging away at a single slender, darting, zig-zagging figure which, crazily enough, was not fleeing from their fire, but was heading straight into their midst!

For the moment the Skipper was forgotten by Crosho's gunmen. He darted aside and flung himself inside the door of a livery barn, where his gloved hands fumbled frantically with the buttons of his long cowhide coat.

Ginger might have ducked behind the corner of the nearest building and been shielded from the flying lead of Crosho's gun-slingers. But he wasn't red-headed for nothing. He had fought his way along the daredevil trail ever

since he had been big enough to wrangle a hogleg. He didn't know how to fight a defensive battle, even against overwhelming odds. To him a fight meant just one thing—to carry the battle to the enemy, no matter how badly he was outnumbered. Sheer audacity had won him more than one clash at arms. Audacity was a weapon in itself. Take the enemy by surprise, and rush 'em off their feet before they realized their superiority, was his philosophy. And the beauty of it was, it almost always worked!

He was on the jump even as he fired the first shot, which sent Jim-Bob's gun spinning. Before the stunned gunmen realized what was happening, Ginger was almost in their midst. The nearest rider twisted in his saddle and cut down on the rampaging redhead—and his right shoulder stopped a forty-five slug.

A bullet ripped through a wing of his chaps. Ginger nicked the gent who had fired it. Now he was in the very midst of the horsemen, which was a decided advantage, for it forced some to hold their fire for fear of winging their comrades. Ginger plunged on—not blindly, for he had a definite object in view.

CHAPTER IV

Rampaging Redhead

PANDEMONIUM raged in the main street of Johnson City. The sudden blast of gunfire set the horses of Crosho's riders rearing and milling, frantic with terror. The gunmen not only had to battle this redheaded holy terror, but they had to fight their ponies to a standstill, first. Yet Ginger had counted upon this very factor to aid him in his audacious scheme.

Crosho and Jim-Bob were dismounted. The father had drawn his gun, but had not fired a shot. To fire into that milling mass was far more likely to result in drilling one of his own men than in getting this demoniacal ginger-top. Crosho was bellowing orders at the top of his voice, but the crackling of gunfire, the shriek of the blizzard, the pounding of panicky hoofs, drowned them out. Jim-Bob, as soon as he had recovered from his astonishment, had made a dive for his fallen gun.

Doors were spilling forth startled townsmen for blocks in either direction. But the nearest sought shelter from the flying lead, and those farther away kept their distance. The sheriff came piling out of his office, buckling his gunbelt about him as he ran toward the scene of the uproar.

Wad Tansy rounded a corner two blocks away and came tearing in toward the battleground as fast as his spraddled legs would bear him. But Wad wasn't built for speed, and his awkward galloping waddle failed to eat up much ground. But he made up for it with wild flourishes of his gun and a terrifying bellow, although as yet he didn't know what it was all about.

Ginger, dodging through the milling horses, ducked a slashing blow of a six-gun aimed at his head. A gun blazed almost in his face, and his forty-five roared again. He saw Jim-Bob diving for his fallen gun and smacked him on the cheek with his open hand. As Jim-Bob went reeling, Ginger grabbed him by his collar, and jerked him upright so violently that his teeth rattled.

At the same instant he jammed his gun in Jim-Bob's ribs and twisted him about so as to shield himself from the enemy bullets. Ginger's back was against the wall of the livery barn, now.

And then, suddenly, the firing ceased as abruptly as it had begun. The whole melee had lasted scarcely more than thirty seconds. It ended with Ginger holding Jim-Bob as a hostage and Crosho's men helpless, afraid to shoot for fear of winging their boss's son. The Skipper, gun in hand, came plunging from the stable door. But by the time he reached

the street, the battle was over and Ginger was master of the situation.

"Who the hell are *you?*" exploded Crosho furiously, "and what call do *you* have to horn in on this fuss?"

"None of your damned business!" panted Ginger. He dared not reveal the real reason why he had intervened, for that would have meant that he must admit the killing of Trent. His best bet was to adopt a hard-boiled "go to hell" attitude—and the redhead could be just as hard and tough and brazen as the hardest of 'em. "If yuh don't like it, yuh savvy what yuh can do about it! And you and yore boys better talk pretty to this redhead, if papa don't crave to sop up the bloody shreds of his son's carcass with a sponge!"

To emphasize his words, he jabbed Jim-Bob in the ribs with the muzzle of his six-gun. The younger Griet flinched, and his face suddenly went a toad-belly white.

"Goshamighty!" cried the Skipper, planting himself alongside his rescuer. He was fully as astounded as anyone by the mystifying and audacious move of this daredevil young stranger in coming to his rescue, apparently for no reason at all. But it was Ginger's marksmanship, as well as his daring, which had elicited the gasp from the Six Slash Six owner. "He shot Jim-Bob's gun away and winged three of Crosho's men, all of 'em in the right shoulder, each one in the same spot, to a hair's breath! What a shot! What a fighting hellcat!"

And then Sheriff Stark, gun in hand, burst through the semicircle. With the advent of the law, the townsmen swarmed in behind him, talking excitedly and trying to figure out what it was all about.

"What in the name of the sixteen thousand sidewinders is coming off here?" he demanded belligerently. "Holster yore guns, everybody, or I'll deal myself in and do some shooting on my own hook!"

Sheepishly, Crosho's men followed the example of their leader and stowed their hardware. Only after they had done so did the Skipper lower his weapon. "Let him go," he whispered to Ginger. "Crosho's too wise to make any more trouble, now that the law's here."

Ginger shoved Jim-Bob forward. Then he hauled off and kicked him with such violence that he lifted him, spread-eagled, clear of the ground and sent him sprawling on his face in the snow. "I'll get you for this!" he snarled as he scrambled to his feet, limping.

Anywhere except in the range country the sheriff's demand would have elicited an outpouring of charges and counter-charges. But the code of the rangeland frowned upon an individual who appealed to the law to settle his personal differences with an enemy. So it was not strange that Crosho, still scowling blackly, merely said:

"Nothing but a friendly little celebration by the boys, Sheriff. A drink too many, and they figgered it was the Fourth of July and started shooting into the air, for fun."

"That's right, Sheriff," chimed in the Skipper, grinning. "Nothing to make a fuss about."

Sheriff Stark, of course, knew that they were both lying. But what could he do about it if neither side made a complaint against the other? Single-handed, he could not hope to jail them all, merely for making a disturbance.

"Shooting in the air, for fun?" he repeated scornfully. "And I suppose them three lads that got nicked in the shoulder was flapping through the air like cock-eyed cherubims, and got brung down like when yuh bangs into a flock of ducks with a scatter gun!"

"I'll tell yuh what happened, Sheriff!" burst forth Jim-Bob hysterically, holding the seat of his pants with one hand and pointing at Ginger with the other. "That condemned redhead—"

"Shut up!" exploded Crosho furiously. "Yuh've caused enough trouble already by going off half-cocked, yuh numskull! Hobble yore tongue and leave me do the talking, see?"

As Jim-Bob subsided the sheriff turned to Ginger. "Redhead, yo're a stranger in our midst, and when I see a stranger it's my duty to take him in and jail him if he shows signs of being a ruckus-wrangler and a hard hombre like you. There's more trouble caused by you tumbleweeding grubline tramps than—"

"Just a second, Sheriff," interrupted the Skipper indignantly. "This sorrel-top ain't no grubliner. He's working for my Six Slash Six, regular!"

"The hell yuh say!" exclaimed the surprised Ginger, who at that moment hadn't the slightest intention of hiring up with anyone.

The sheriff looked from the Skipper to Ginger doubtfully and then at Crosho. "Clear outa town, the whole kit and kaboodle of yuh!" he growled finally. "I oughta slam yuh all into jail, by rights."

"Fair enough," agreed Crosho, with a forced and sickly grin. "Jim-Bob, take the boys and shove off back to the ranch. I'll catch up with yuh as soon as I report to the sheriff what happened down by the gorge. Sheriff, I'd like to talk with yuh a minute."

"I'll see yuh at my office soon as this street is cleared," growled the sheriff. Just as Crosho's glowering crew began to move sullenly away and the crowd of shivering spectators to dissolve, a panting, stumpy, bowlegged figure burst into the center of the group.

"Tuck yore tails and hiper, yuh 'scallions!" he bellowed after Crosho's departing crew. "'Cause I'm Wad Tansy, the ring-tailed hellion from Powder River, where they cut their teeth on forty-five's and eat their meat raw! I'm so short my feet don't touch the ground, but in my holster is old Betsy, who cuts 'em all down to my size! I'm a five-foot stick of dynamite, and when I explodes the devil gets a hundred new customers!"

He turned to Sheriff Stark and boomed reassuringly: "S'all right, Sheriff. I got the situation well in hand. They dassn't do nothing when Wad Tansy's on the job!"

The Skipper held out his hand to Ginger. "I don't know why yuh done it, son, but yuh shore saved my hide from that pack of wolves. A job is little enough to offer yuh in return for—"

"I didn't do it in the hope of getting a job," frowned Ginger. "I wasn't playing the stands for that."

"I—I didn't mean it thataway," said the ranchman, surprised. "Of course, there's nothing I can do to repay you for what you've—"

"Forget it!" advised Ginger. "Ten against one is cowboy's fun, and I couldn't stand by and let 'em blot yuh out. No obligations, Mister. I'm rich. I got more'n six dollars in my pocket. For why should I want a job?"

Wad snatched off his Stetson and, in sheer exuberance of spirits, slammed it on the ground. "I'm half-brother to a timber wolf!" he informed the world. "I'm only five foot nothing, but when I howl I send 'em all scurrying to their burrows! Ginger, me and you, we shore made a monkey out of 'em this time, eh?"

There was a sudden flurry, and down the boardwalk came darting a slender little figure in a fur coat. Ginger gave a start of surprise as his glance noted the mop of dark curls, touseled by the wind, and the brown eyes, sparkling with excitement. It was none other than Rita Andrix, the former schoolmarm of the Maxwell Grant, whose presence in the Boreas country had been the deciding factor in leading him northward.

But the girl had no eyes for him, for no one, in fact, except the Skipper, into whose arms she rushed impetuously.

"Dad!" she cried anxiously. "What's happened? Are you—unhurt?"

"Yeah, I'm all right, Honey," the Skipper assured her with a comforting pat. "Thanks to that sorrel-skulled young stranger, there. He's the reason yuh ain't a orphan, Rita."

The girl turned. "Ginger!" she cried in delight and astonishment. "Ginger Fortune! What—what in the world are you doing—*here?*"

Ginger jerked off his hat and grinned, reddening uncomfortably, and twisted the brim of the lid in his fingers.

"Howdy, Rita. Why, I'm just ambling round the country for to see what I can see. Touristing, kinda. This is a swell country yuh got here—sorta balmy. I'm getting to like it, fine." He turned to Rita's father. "Mister Andrix, I done changed my mind. I'd be much obliged to take that job of work with the Six Slash Six—if'n it's still open."

Wad was pawing in the snow like a steer foraging on a winter range. "Did anybody see my snakeskin hatband?" he asked. "It musta fell off when I slammed my Stetson in the snow. I dunno what I'll do if it's lost. It always brung me good luck. Without it I wouldn't be half the man I am."

"Yo're only half a man already, Wad," grinned the Skipper. "If yuh was subdivided again yuh'd be a minus quantity. And yuh wouldn't lose yore hatband if yuh wore yore J. B. lid on yore head instead of on the ground."

He turned to Ginger. "Fella, d'yuh know where the Six Slash Six lays? If yuh do, yuh better be shoving off, right now. They was a plumb snaky look in young Jim-Bob's eyes when yuh kicked him in the—in the middle of the street. He's pizen mean, as forgiving as a sidewinder, and when he meets up with yuh he won't exactly toss yuh a sweet kiss. Yuh better be making tracks whilst him and his pa are talking with the sheriff. Me and Rita will be trailing along after a spell when I got the mail and she's bought some doo-dads at the store."

"Seems to me," said Ginger, "that I oughta wait and go with you. Yuh'll need somebody who's handy with a gun, maybe."

The Skipper shook his head. "Crosho's hard as a mouthful of nails, but he don't fight womenfolk. There are two-three of my boys in town, besides Wad, and they're all the protection we need. Yo're the one the Griets are after, and if yo're with us, yuh may be the means of bringing trouble on us and causing another fight 'stead of stopping one. Yo're taking orders from me, now, and my orders are to get going before the Rocking H outfit knows yo're gone."

Ginger grinned. "Seeing as yuh put it *that* way, I'll be seeing yuh at the ranch, then."

Five minutes later he was heading forth into the howling blizzard once more, while Crosho Griet was closeted with the sheriff, relating his story of the finding of Branson Trent's body. There was not the slightest shred of evidence to connect Ginger with the killing. Crosho was trying to blame it on the Six Slash Six, of course, but his slender evidence was unconvincing.

Jim-Bob, however, took no part in the conference. Hatred of the redhead who had humiliated him was smoldering within him. He set one of his men to watch Ginger. When the latter lined out for the ranch, Jim-Bob and all the unwounded members of the Rocking H crew were on his trail.

CHAPTER V

Hate's Labor Lost

IT seemed to Ginger that it was growing cold enough to freeze the toes off a brass monkey. Now and again as he rode he rubbed his cheeks and his nose with his gloved hands to keep them from being frozen. Except for his face and feet, the motion of his pony kept him middling warm.

The wind howled dismally, as though the blizzard were a wolf and somebody had stepped on its tail. There were times when Ginger thought he could hear the chilling yowl of a real wolf, but he decided that it was nothing but the wind. Any wolf that was fool enough to sashay around in such weather, when it might as well be holed up snug and warm in its den, was crazy anyway, he thought.

He wondered what effect, if any, the death of Branson Trent would have on the situation in the Boreas range feud. It might mean a new deal all round and a chance for the Skipper to shove his critters down to the plains country and save 'em from starvation. Which, he figured, was the reason why Trent's death had made Crosho Griet so all-fired gnashy.

He pulled his hat down lower over his face, bowed his head against the blast, and urged his pony into a brisk trot. As he passed a shoulder of rock, a lariat whistled through the air and settled over his shoulders. He didn't see it coming because his head was down; didn't hear it because the shrieking wind drowned out its sibilant whish; didn't feel it until too late, when the noose jerked taut and pinned his arms to his sides.

Ginger stopped right there, but his pony kept on trotting, out from under him. He landed in a shallow drift, just as a chorus of elated whoops sounded from behind the rock. He struggled like a madman, but found himself as helpless as a forefooted steer when the lass' rope busts it belly-up on the ground.

The next moment half a dozen brawny cowhands swarmed over him. . . . He could hear the voice of Jim-Bob yelling: "Don't shoot him, boys, less'n yuh have to! We don't want no telltale bullet holes in his carcass!"

His arms were pinned to his sides, and he couldn't get his hand on his gun. He kicked one cowhand under the chin and sent him pinwheeling over backwards. With his knee he knocked the breath out of another. But that was all the damage he could inflict, for the next instant he was pinned flat in the snowdrift, with one husky cowhand squatting on his head, one with both knees in his stomach, and one wrestling with each leg.

"Let him set up, boys," called Jim-Bob, who had taken no part in the actual fighting, but who had remained on his horse directing operations. "Shuck his gun off'n him, and if he makes a phoney move, bend it over his skull!"

"Lemme at him!" mumbled the one whom Ginger had kicked under the chin. "I'll be wearing my chin in a sling for a week!"

"Leave him be!" barked Jim-Bob. "I'll 'tend to him, I will! I'll make him wisht he never kicked me in the pants!"

Ginger blinked the snow from his eyes as he sat up, his arms still tied fast by the lariat. "Well, if it ain't little Snake-face, hisself!" he exclaimed. "Merry Christmas, Jim-Bob. Does yore papa know what yo're up to?"

"Don't give me none of yore lip," growled Jim-Bob. "If yo're wise, yuh'll be using yore time to say yore prayers!"

Ginger laughed. "Gimme my gun and I'll say 'em with lead. What yuh cooking up, Jim-Bob? A murder party?"

Jim-Bob spat in the snow. "Nothing like that, Redhead. I just aim to give yuh a little exercise. If yuh stay in the saddle all the time, yuh'll grow hoop-legged like that badger-footed Wad Tansy. I'll take yore hoss, yore coat, yore chaps, and yore boots, then turn yuh loose to do whatever yuh want. Nobody can ever say I ain't willing to give yuh a break!"

Ginger shrugged. "That's right sweet of yuh, Jim-Bob. Yuh do think up the swellest things!"

"Being as yo're a stranger to this range," Jim-Bob went on, "yuh'll likely get considerable exercise. Not knowing yore way about, yuh'll walk in a circle till yore feet begin to get numb. Then, if the wolves don't see yuh first, yuh'll lay down and go to sleep. When yuh wake up, yuh'll be where blizzards are the least of yore troubles."

"That's one comfort," agreed Ginger. "I ain't taken to blizzards, much."

"And when the Spring break-up comes," continued Jim-Bob, his cruel eyes narrowed to slits, "somebody will happen onto a pile of bones, gnawed clean and white and pretty. They'll say: 'This must be that red-headed stranger that disappeared last March. His horse must of piled him, and he got lost in the blizzard. And not knowing the country, he wandered round till the wolves got him, or he froze.'"

Ginger nodded. "Ain't yuh scared I'll come back and ha'nt yuh, Jim-Bob? They do say that red-headed ha'nts are poison mean."

"Of course," said Jim-Bob venomously, "it might be easier for yuh if I put a bullet through yore skull. But that might make folks ask questions when yore carcass is found."

"Yuh do think of all the little trifles, don't yuh, Jim-Bob? Go ahead and get started, 'cause—"

He broke off suddenly as he heard the snow-muffled thud of hoofs. Jim-Bob and his men reached for their guns—and then returned them to their holsters as the approaching horseman proved to be Crosho Griet himself.

"What's coming off here, anyways?" demanded Crosho, scowling, as his eyes fell upon the prisoner. Jim-Bob, shifting uncomfortably in the saddle, told him.

"A swell sap, you are!" burst forth Crosho contemptuously, glaring at his son. "If they's a wrong way of doing things, I can always count on you to do it!"

"He made a monkey outa me in front of the whole town," protested Jim-Bob sullenly. "Did yuh figger I was going to let him get away with it? I thought yuh'd be the first one to back me up!"

"Trouble with you is," growled Crosho, "yuh use yore head for a hat rack. It's a good thing yuh got me to do yore thinking for yuh." He turned to the members of his crew. "All right, boys. Let the redhead loose and catch his hoss for him. And treat him pretty, 'cause he's my guest and he's coming to the ranch for a bite of supper with us."

Jim-Bob started to raise his voice in protest, but thought better of it. The Rocking H hands looked a bit surprised, but none of them uttered a word. Crosho dominated the situation completely.

"I'm right sorry this happened, stranger," he apologized to Ginger. "Jim-Bob was a little sore at the way yuh'd done him, and he just aimed to scare yuh up a bit. He never had the slightest intention of going through with it."

"The hell he didn't!" thought Ginger. "If I ever seen a cuss with murder in his eye, it was Jim-Bob. I wonder what Crosho's got up his sleeve? He's nobody's fool. He ain't doing this just outa simon-pure loving kindness. They's some object back of it."

Aloud, he said: "Sho', I knowed he was just funning with me. For why should anybody want to kill anybody else, just for kicking him?"

He swung into his saddle and remarked: "It's right kind of yuh to invite me to have a snack with yuh, Crosho, but if it's all the same with you, I'll take my gun and be on my way. I'll drop in on yuh some other time, maybe."

"Couldn't think of it!" retorted Crosho, his massive face beaming with forced joviality. "I've always sorta taken to redheads. I like yore looks, and I got a business proposition to

talk over with yuh, which may put yuh in the way of making a heap of money. I just won't take no for a answer."

Ginger laughed. He realized that he was actually as much a prisoner as if he were bound to his horse. Without his gun, he stood as much chance of breaking away as of keeping a match alight in the blizzard. But he didn't have the slightest intention of attempting to escape until he had learned what Crosho had on his chest. He decided to play up to him, act friendly, and learn all he could.

He feared Crosho less than Jim-Bob at the moment, for the father was reasonably intelligent, while the son lacked by a ton of having enough brains to wad a shotgun. He saw in the two just the difference between a grizzly bear, which will kill ruthlessly enough anything which interferes with its plans, and a rattlesnake, which strikes with blind hate and without the least regard for consequences.

Crosho, as Ginger pegged him, wouldn't hesitate to commit murder to further his own ends, but he'd figure things out in advance and would be daggone certain that it would bring him something and that he could get away with it. Jim-Bob, on the other hand, would kill for no other reason than that he had been publicly humiliated, and would let hatred blind his judgment.

In fact, the ruckus in Johnson City supplied the key to the character of each of the Griets. Crosho had framed a situation which would permit him to rid himself of his enemy, the Skipper, without paying penalty to the law. Jim-Bob, on the other hand, had gone off half-cocked and would have shot the Skipper down in a blind rage, without stopping to think that he was letting himself in for a charge of murder.

"Fair enough," agreed Ginger genially as the little cavalcade started out. "I didn't have nothing agin yore son, Crosho, when I shot that gun out'n his hand. I seen that the other feller's coat was buttoned so he couldn't get to his hardware, and it didn't seem like he was getting a square shake."

"He wasn't," agreed Crosho. "Yuh kept my son from making a fool of hisself, Redhead. Maybeso yuh kept him from bogging hisself down pretty bad with the law by killing a defenseless man. I figger that I owe yuh a heap, even though yuh did seem to be taking sides agin us. Jim-Bob peeves pretty easy, but he gets over it quick. I never seen the beat of yore shooting, feller. I wouldn't of believed it possible if I hadn't seen it with my own eyes."

Ginger was a bit puzzled when the group of horsemen wound up at the Tincup ranch, rather than at Crosho's Rocking H.

"Yuh heard me accuse the Skipper of being responsible for the killing of a rancher named Trent," said Crosho to Ginger. "Me and Trent was pretty good friends, which is why I got so gosh-awful sore when I found he'd been murdered. Well, this is his ranch, and I sorta aim to keep an eye on things here, for friendship's sake, or until we learn how his affairs are to be settled. We took his body to the undertaker's shop in Johnson City, and he's to be buried there tomorrow."

Taking their cue from Crosho, everybody laid themselves out to be friendly with Ginger during supper at the ranch—but they neglected to return his gun. Jim-Bob didn't have much to say, but evidently his father had put the bee on him, for he acted almost white during the meal. Afterwards Crosho took Ginger into an adjoining room for a private conference.

"Yo're a stranger hereabouts, Ginger," he said, offering him a black Manila cigar. "Yuh don't savvy anything about the situation hereabouts, so I'm going to explain to yuh. Yuh've guessed from what yuh seen in town

today that me and the Six Slash Six outfit ain't exactly what yuh'd call boozum friends. It all dates back to when the Skipper slickered me outa some valuable water rights He's a louse, Ginger, and the only thing to do with a louse is to stomp on him. They's been a lot of my calves sleepered, and while I never could prove it on him, I know he's behind it. This range ain't big enough for me and him. One of us has got to go!"

Ginger grinned. "From what yuh say, I take it yuh don't fancy the gent."

"I don't. Well, the original owner of this Tincup spread got killed. Nobody never knowed who done it, but you can guess. Somebody wanted to get his hooks on the Tincup so's he could freeze me out, and I'll leave yuh to guess who 'twas. . . . But I beat him to it. I made it worth while for Branson Trent to buy the Tincup and play my game with me. I aimed to show the Skipper that two could play the game of freeze-out. And everything would of worked out just like I'd planned, only the Skipper isn't no numskull. He see he was sewed up as long as Trent owned the place and was playing with me. So he killed Trent."

"Are yuh shore of that?" asked Ginger.

"Who else could of done it? Nobody else had any reason. And it was a slick move, too. Trent told me his only heir was a stepson. Now, this stepson is a tumbleweeder, a gunslinger and a tough cooky, and nobody knows where he's at or whether he'll ever show up. If Trent's estate is administered by an outside executor, he may not play my game. Or, if the stepson does show up, he may kick over the traces. That's why I'm propositioning you."

"Propositioning me?" repeated Ginger. "For why? I don't savvy."

"It's thisaway," explained Crosho. "All anybody knows about this stepson is that his name's Frank Fortune, he's handy with a gun, and he has red hair. Yo're handy with a gun, yuh got red hair, and yuh can easy change yore name to Frank Fortune. I want yuh to pretend you're him, claim the Tincup, and play the game my way!"

CHAPTER VI

Where to Head In

GINGER was flabbergasted by Crosho's calm proposal that he impersonate himself in order to claim the Tincup, but he possessed a good poker mug and did not permit his astonishment to become apparent.

"Goshamighty!" he said to himself. "This jasper is asking *me* to impersonate *myself!* Was they ever a crazier deal than that? If he only knowed that I'm Frank Fortune, his own self, I wonder would he be honing so hard to have me claim the Tincup? The only name he knows me by is Ginger, and nobody hardly ever calls me anything else, so it's reasonable enough that he'd pick me for his dirty work 'cause I fit the description of me."

And then an inspiration socked him like the kick of a mule. Why, Crosho was playing right into his hands! Why not go through with the deal and claim the Tincup—and then tell Crosho to go take a dive in a snowdrift?

"Talk some more," he said to Crosho evenly. "I don't exactly get yore drift. What is there in it for me?"

"Well," continued Crosho, with a broad grin, "they's plenty in it for you, and here's the way we'll work it. You'll show up after the funeral tomorrow, when Trent's will is to be read in the office of Lawyer Laska, in town. Trent has told me he's willed everything to this stepson. You'll sashay up and say yo're the stepson, and to prove it yuh'll present some papers and things that I can get for yuh from Trent's desk. Yuh'll fix up some story that yuh were on yore

way to visit yore dear stepfather and arrived just in time to learn the Six Slash Six had killed him."

"Sounds interesting," admitted Ginger. "And then what?"

"Then yuh'll let it slip that yuh don't crave to be a rancher and that yuh'd rather have the cash, if yuh can get a buyer. And I'll buy yuh out. Then you can blow the country with a thousand dollars in cash for yore trouble—which is a heap of money for any ordinary cowhand."

"But I thought they was a lot of red tape and legal monkeyshines and delay and everything in settling up an estate."

"Usually, they is. But in this case, Trent ain't got any assets except this ranch, and it all goes to one heir, and the heir shows up prompt. Even if it takes a few weeks to wind things up, the court will leave yuh in charge of the Tincup—which is the main thing I want. A week more is all I need to force the Skipper's back agin the wall and freeze him out."

"I get yuh. And besides that, yo're getting a mighty valuable ranch for only the measly little thousand dollars yo're going to pay me!"

Crosho scowled. "That's where yo're off on the wrong foot, Ginger. I put up the money for Trent to buy the Tincup in the first place. I didn't figger Trent would be killed. Now it's *my* money he's willing to his stepson —which ain't right. Being bought with my money, the Tincup is really mine. In cooking up this plan to get it transferred back to me, I'm only getting back what I put into it—less the thousand dollars I aim to pay you for yore trouble. See?"

"I see. But what if I shouldn't want to sell after I'd claimed the Tincup?"

Crosho knocked the ashes from his cigar and grinned. "I've got that all figgered out. The very first thing yuh got to do is to sign a deed, with the date blank, conveying the Tincup to me for 'one thousand dollars and other valuable consideration.' At any time I want, I fill in the date and file the deed in the county recorder's office and the Tincup is mine. You don't get yore money until the last trick is turned and yo're ready to blow the country—though meanwhile I can let yuh have any ready cash yuh need. There ain't a possible way yuh can double-cross me."

It was Ginger's turn to grin. "Yuh shore got a head on yore shoulders, Crosho. Yuh've shore thought out everything in advance. Only thing is, what if the *real* stepson shows up meanwhile? The real Frank Fortune could make it mighty tough for an impostor, couldn't he?"

Crosho's eyes narrowed. "He's a tramp, and they ain't much chanct he'll show up. But if he does, just leave him to me. I'll fix him so he won't bother nobody!"

Ginger was vastly puzzled. In view of what he had learned from Wad Tansy, supplemented by what Crosho had just told him, he just couldn't figure things out to make sense. If Branson Trent was a decent enough gent to will his property to a stepson whom he had never seen, why in the name of common sense had he tried to kill that stepson the moment he had laid eyes upon him?

He could readily see how Trent's death had jammed up Crosho's scheme to keep the Skipper bottled up until he went to smash or was forced to sell. But Crosho had certainly lost no time in formulating another scheme to retain his dominant position in the Boreas country. He had foreseen every contingency, apparently, and Ginger realized the difficulty of carrying out his most recent plan by laying claim to the Tincup, ostensibly as Crosho's tool. The undated deed protected Crosho and prevented him from carrying out any such plan.

"Well," Crosho was asking, "how about it?"

"What if I decided not to take up yore proposition?" queried Ginger cautiously.

Crosho seemed taken aback, staring at him as if this were an angle he had not considered. Finally he shrugged.

"I can find plenty cowhands that'll be glad to earn a thousand dollars that easy. What's the matter? Holding out for more money?"

"Nope. I just ain't taken to the idea, Crosho. For why should I help yuh cheat Trent's stepson outa what's rightfully his'n? Us redheads got to stick together, yuh know."

Crosho couldn't seem to get it through his skull that Ginger actually was turning down his proposal.

"But think of the money in it, fella!" he exclaimed. "I can even hike the ante a little if yuh'll play my game with me."

Ginger rose to his feet. "Thanks just the same, Crosho. It's right kind of yuh to pick me to shower down yore favors on. But I ain't in the market, at present. I'll be drifting along, I reckon. See yuh some other time."

Crosho banged a hamlike fist on the table. "Wait!" he bellowed furiously. "D'yuh reckon I'm going to let yuh go, now? Yuh know too daggoned much to be running round loose!"

"So that's the way things lay, is it?" exclaimed Ginger. "Yuh can't buy me, so yo're trying to scare me, er? Well, Crosho, us redheads don't scare worth a cent!"

Crosho got a grip on himself and shrugged. "I should of let Jim-Bob do yuh like he wanted. They's only one way to handle a stubborn cow brute—or human!"

"That's right, Crosho. So yuh aim to turn me into a supper for the wolves, or let me wander on foot till the blizzard turns me into a frozen dainty, do yuh?"

"Not if yuh see the light and decide to play the game with me, Ginger. But if yuh got to be mulish—well, I'll have to turn yuh over to Jim-Bob and let him get rid of yuh!"

Crosho's massive face was twisted into a black scowl, dire and cruel. But Ginger grinned amiably as he said:

"Well, Crosho, yuh'll have to catch me first!" And as he spoke, he launched himself at his captor like a leaping wildcat.

Crosho, deceived by the redhead's genial manner, was unprepared for such a move. His hand leaped toward his holster as Ginger plunged toward him, and from his twisted lips burst a bellow of alarm.

Ginger's fist cracked against Crosho's ear. And as he spun about under the impact, the redhead's fingers closed upon the wrist of his gun hand just as the six-gun leaped from its holster.

The next instant the gun roared deafeningly. But the bullet plowed into the floor. With one hand gripping Crosho's wrist and the other on the barrel of the gun, Ginger strove to wrench the weapon free. Crosho's fist suddenly smashed into his face like a sledgehammer and left his ears ringing and his brain swimming.

Simultaneously, Crosho jerked backward violently in a mighty effort to yank his six-gun free. He was far heavier than the wiry redhead, and he almost wrenched him off his feet. Ginger could hear a sudden uproar in the adjoining room—excited shouts and the pounding of feet. . . .

As the door burst open, Ginger, utilizing the impetus of Crosho's backward jerk, charged at his heavier foe and caught him in the bread basket with one shoulder. Crosho, taken off balance, was hurled backward against the opening door. His bulk and the force of Ginger's charge forced it shut again, but only for an instant.

Crosho, recovering himself, heaved forward. The redhead, instead of resisting the heave, lunged backward and dropped to the floor, still clinging tenaciously to the gun arm of his foe. His jerk, combined with the impetus of Crosho's lunge, sent the lat-

ter stumbling forward to trip over the crouching Ginger and to go crashing into the table. At the same instant, the door burst open a second time and the Rocking H hands poured into the room.

The table overturned, the lamp crashed to the floor. The room was plunged into complete darkness. . . .

"Here he is, boys!" howled Crosho. "Kill him! Stomp him into a mess of hash!"

Ginger wanted that gun. Without it, he felt as helpless as a one-armed man in a battle royal. With it, he was certain he stood an even chance of shooting his way to freedom. But the dousing of the light was a break in his favor, and he was quick to take advantage of it. Better to escape, even though unarmed, than to go down fighting, even though he took a half-dozen of the enemy with him.

Instantly he released his grip on Crosho's wrist. The ranchman's free hand was clawing at his shoulder. He wriggled free and leaped to his feet. Someone collided with him in the darkness. He lashed out with one fist. It found a mark in solid flesh and brought forth a gasp of pain.

He darted toward the door, only to find his path blocked by Crosho's gunmen. Head down, he bulled his way into the shouting, cursing group. He hurled one violently out of his path, smashed another to the floor and trampled over him.

"Where is he?" howled someone.

"Over here!" called a voice.

"Ouch! Yuh damned idiot—it was *me* yuh hit!" yelled another.

And then Ginger saw the dim oblong of light which marked the door suddenly blotted out as someone slammed it shut.

"Hold the door!" foghorned Crosho frantically. "He can't get away if yuh hold the door! Strike a match, somebody, and we'll tromp him into the floor!"

Ginger saw that it was hopeless to expect to escape by way of the door with the crew ganged up in front of it. He turned toward the nearest window, smashing and butting and kicking a path for himself. And then someone struck a match.

A blood-thirsty howl went up as the flickering flame revealed the rampaging redhead plowing through his foes. Crosho leveled his gun, but dared not shoot for fear of winging one of his own men. A moment later the match burned down to the fingers of its holder, and he dropped it.

Instantly a sheet of flame leaped toward the ceiling as the match dropped in a pool of oil from the shattered lamp. A puff of black smoke billowed upward. . . .

A chorus of panicky yells arose. Instantly there was a concerted break for the door and windows. But Ginber had gotten a head start on all of them. He dived headlong, taking pane and screen with him.

He struck in the snow outside and bounded to his feet. Six jumps and he was around the corner of the house, momentarily safe from the Rocking H bullets. He sped toward the corral where three saddled horses were awaiting the riders who were to relieve the guardians of the gorge.

Cowhands were boiling from almost every window of the ranch house. A licking flame was rising from the window through which Ginger had dove. Guns began to blaze as the redhead yanked the bridles of two of the ponies loose and hopped into the saddle of the third. Something whined past his head as he fed his pony the steel—and it wasn't the wind, either. He had slapped the other two horses as he loosed them, and they had headed off into the blizzard, hell-bent for nowhere.

He swung about the corner of the barn, keeping it between himself and the guns of Crosho's men. By the time they sighted him again, he was a mere flitting shadow in the swirling wraiths of wind-driven snow.

"It'll be a cold night for Crosho

and his boys if they don't put that fire out 'fore it burns the house to the ground," he chuckled as he glanced back over his shoulder. Dimly he could see the rosy glow of the fire through the driving flakes. He had no fear of pursuit, now, for he knew, and he knew that they knew, that he could lose himself in the storm long before they could saddle fresh horses. He headed up the Big Johnson toward the Six Slash Six.

CHAPTER VII

Backs Against the Wall

TO his surprise, Ginger found the entire Six Slash Six crew saddled and ready to set out in search of him. He sensed an air of suppressed excitement as he rode up to the group clustered about the corrals. No one noticed that he was not riding his own horse. At the sight of him, Wad Tansy dashed his hat to the ground angrily.

"Well, here yuh are at last!" he boomed. "I may be so short my feet don't touch the ground, but I got brains enough not to get myself lost in a two-bit snowstorm! They ain't anybody in the world crazier than a redhead! Yuh sorrel-topped ape, don't yuh know yuh daggoned near spoiled the makings of the swellest—"

"Wait a minute!" interrupted Ginger, grinning. "Wait till I tell yuh about—"

"Save it till tomorrow," cut in the Skipper sharply, but with an air of evident relief. "I was blaming myself for being the death of yuh by sending you, a stranger to the country, out alone into the blizzard. But now that yuh showed up, okay, everybody's satisfied—and we got something more important to think about."

Rita, her fur coat hastily thrown about her, emerged from the kitchen door, obviously relieved, as he started to unsaddle. "Let us know in advance the next time you plan to get lost, will you?" she asked, smiling.

"I wasn't lost," grinned Ginger. "I was just paying a sorta social call on Crosho Griet and Jim-Bob."

She peered at him suspiciously. "If I thought that was true, I'd send you packing back into the blizzard. No friend of the Griets is welcome here!"

"'S a fact," he affirmed, still grinning. "Crosho said he'd make it worth my while to pretend I was Trent's stepson and claim the Tincup so's to keep yore pa from getting through. He's a mighty generous feller, don't yuh think?"

Rita frowned. "Ginger, if I didn't know you so well, I'd think you were telling the truth!"

"I've been known to tell the truth," he admitted, banteringly. He did not mention his fight with Crosho and his crew, for it would have sounded as if he were bragging if he told that he had outfought the whole outfit, and Ginger was anything but a braggart. "But there ain't no law to compel yuh to believe me if yuh don't wanta. And I reckon yuh'd believe me if I told yuh I been playing tag with the storm fairies. Or that I catched a timber wolf by the tail and didn't dast let go. Anyways, I never took up Crosho's proposition."

From Rita's expression, it was plain she thought Ginger was "kidding" her—as, to some extent, he was. "You almost jammed up dad's game," she went on hurriedly. "He's planning a bold play, staking everything on one last audacious move. You see, Trent's funeral is to be held in Johnson City tomorrow morning. Crosho and Jim-Bob are certain to attend, and probably all of Trent's Tincup crew.

"That should mean that the Tincup ranch will probably be deserted and unable to send reenforcements to the guards posted at the gorge. They won't be expecting us to try to run the gauntlet of the gorge in the midst of such a blizzard, anyway. So—"

"So he's figgering to shove the Six Slash Six critters through?" Ginger interrupted eagerly. "It's the chance

of a lifetime, Rita! He'll catch 'em unawares, short-handed, and leaderless, and the blizzard will hide the Six Slash Six drive until it's almost on top of 'em, so's they won't have no time to prepare for a fight! The Sk—I mean, yore dad has shore thought everything out!"

Rita's eyes were dancing with excitement. "But he was willing to abandon his plan, just to save one strange cowpuncher whom he thought was lost in the storm! Because, if our boys had spent the night searching for you, they'd be in no shape for the battle tomorrow, and the drive—which may mean another thirty-six hours in the saddle without sleep. That's what I meant when I said you almost wrecked his plans, Ginger, by getting lost."

Ginger found the Six Slash Six bunkhouse seething with excitement at the prospect of the morrow's clash. Guns were being oiled and cartridge belts stuffed with shells. In the furore his own little adventure was almost forgotten, for it was taken for granted that he had merely lost his way in the st rm. None questioned him, and he volunteered no explanations—for, in fact, he was so elated himself at the prospect of the battle that he had little thought to give to the events of the last few hours.

"This is the chanct I been waiting for ever sinct I come from Powder River!" proclaimed Wad Tansy enthusiastically. "I been craving to collect me a few dozen Flying H and Tincup pelts to nail to my door! I may be just a ring-tailed runt, but when I cut loose with my forty-five persuader, the world's gotta stop, look and listen!"

Someone informed Wad that he was just a pimple on the face of creation, to which he retorted that even a pimple could be almighty aggravating.

"Only thing is," he added regretfully, "we got one mighty tough thing against us. And that is, I done lost my rattlesnake hatband. It's always brung me powerful good luck, and I shore hate to go into a gun fuss without it. I'd rather lose a hind leg than that snakeskin band!"

"If yuh lost *both* hind legs, yuh wouldn't be no worse off than yuh are now!" was the rejoinder. "Yore legs are so bandy-shaped they don't do yuh no good, anyways."

"Is that so?" retorted Wad indignantly. "Well, I'd ruther my legs was warped than my brain, like yore'n! You boys got one advantage over me, though—if yore brains are all blowed out tomorrow, yuh'll be able to go ahead just the same as ever, and nobody'll ever know the difference!"

During the night the mercury almost burst the bottom out of the thermometer. Long before daylight the crew was routed out, to find that the snow had almost ceased falling, although the wind was howling like a hungry banshee.

"Whoo-ee!" shivered Wad as he fitted his stocking-leg over his ears, preparatory to making the dash to the ranch house where the wind-ripped smoke snatched from the chimney told that the grub-spoiler was on the job making breakfast. "I come from Powder River where it gets so daggoned cold that the prairie hawks dassn't fly for fear their shadows will freeze to the ground, but I never seen the beat of this for cold! When a feller spits, he spits an icycle. He dassn't light a cigareet 'cause the match flame will freeze solid. What I mean, it's *cold!*"

But after the belly-robber had filled them full of steaming hot Java and flapjacks and pig-strip, the bleak outdoors didn't look half so frigid.

"Boys," announced the Skipper, "our backs are plumb agin the wall! In making this play we may be drawing to a inside straight, with all the chances agin us, but it's our only hope. We got to bust through that gorge, or go bust ourselves. I ain't got a dime to meet yore wages, come

payday, but if I can get our critters out'n this trap so I can give the bank more security than a trainload of carcasses, I can get all the money I need. If we don't win through, yuh'll all be out of jobs and flat broke, but at that yuh'll have ten thousand dollars more'n I will. We're up agin a tough lot of gun-slingers, but we're just as hard as they are, and we can shoot just as straight, and—and— Aw, shucks! Yuh all know what I mean. Let's go!"

The Skipper was pretty well stove up, but he was still spry enough to stick to a saddle, and he allowed there were a couple of good fights still left in the old carcass. He beamed like an April sunrise at the cheer which went up from his men and gripped his gun like a spavined old war horse champing at the bit.

Rita couldn't go along, of course. Neither could she be left at the ranch for, if the assault on the gorge were successful, the Skipper and his crew would not return from the prairie grazing lands until the snow was gone and the grass showed green on the hillsides. So it was decided that she was to be taken to Johnson City later in the morning by the cook, there to remain with family friends until her father's return. The cook couldn't participate in the drive because he had only one leg—although he was wont to brag that he'd rather have that one than a dozen spraddled ones like Wad's.

The horses had been saddled but not bridled, because any fool knows what happens when you put a cold steel bit in a horse's mouth at twenty-six degrees below zero. But the bits had been warmed during breakfast, and within two shakes of a latigo the whole crew was in the saddle and whooping it up toward the barbed wire boudoir where the whitefaces had been gathered for winter-feeding.

And presently, the herd was trailing down the bank of Big Johnson Creek, lashed from behind by the ripping wind. Powdery snow was swirling through the air, but how much of it had been stirred up from the ground by the gale, and how much was snifting down from above, it was hard to tell. As hard to tell as when sunup came, for the advent of daylight meant merely the gradual graying of the sky.

Everyone was wishing that the snow would thicken up, the better to conceal their movements—for the Tincup ranch lay just above the gorge, and it would be almost impossible to shove the herd past the ranch unseen, unless the place was deserted because of Trent's funeral.

"I've done heard of the zero hour," muttered Wad as they neared the Tincup, "but this is the first time I ever run up against a thirty-below-zero hour! I come from Powder River where they breed 'em tough, but my hide is tougher than I think it is if it can keep from being frost-bit this time. Somebody says it's cold enough to freeze the tail off a brass monkey. Which makes me thankful . . . thankful that I don't wear a tail."

As the drive neared the ranch, the Skipper sent Ginger and Wad ahead to scout around. One end of the ranch house was burnt to the ground, much to the amazement of Wad, who hazarded the guess that the occupants had gotten so dad-blamed cold that they had burnt it in an effort to keep warm. Then Ginger related briefly the story of his capture and subsequent escape.

"Wouldn't that discombobulate yuh?" exclaimed Wad angrily. "I got to give it to Crosho—he don't never pass up no bets! He's slick as a slippery elm, but twict as crooked. Well, this is the time we leave him holding the sack. And when he opens it, he'll find it contains two bushels of nothing!"

They could see smoke rising from the stove-pipe chimney of the bunk house—smoke that was immediately whipped away by the ripping wind.

It indicated the presence of someone at the ranch, but it also gave Ginger an idea.

"We couldn't want a better chanct!" he said to Wad enthusiastically. "For why can't we sneak up on 'em and capture 'em whilst they're all in a bunch and cheat the Skipper and the boys out of a lot of fun?"

"Leave it to me," suggested Wad, grinning. "I'll surround 'em."

They left their ponies ground-hitched in the brakes alongside the stream and crept forward on foot. They kept the barn between the bunkhouse and themselves, but after they had reached it they found it was an unnecessary precaution. For the bunkhouse windows were so coated with frost that no one inside could see out.

Guns in their gloved hands, they approached its lone door boldly. Ginger kicked it open, bounced inside, and shouted out a peremptory order to "Stick 'em up!"

"Make 'em perpendicular, yuh stink lizards!" boomed Wad fiercely from behind him. "Scratch the ceiling, every last one of yuh, less'n yuh crave to be made sieves out of! 'Cause I'm Wad Tansy from Powder River, and I eat my meat raw and wash it down with a bucket of blood! And this is my red-headed pal who has pinked four of yuh already and can shoot four bits out of the center of a silver dollar at a thousand paces! And we're both plumb ripe for a massacre!"

But instead of finding half of Crosho's crew, as they had expected, they discovered no one but Jim-Bob, who was playing solitaire alongside the red-hot pot-bellied stove. He snatched for the rafters promptly enough.

"Aw, hell!" spat Wad in disgust. "I knowed I'd never have no luck without my snakeskin hatband! Here I was counting on exterminating a whole den of wolves, and all we draw is one measly unweaned pup! Grab him by the hind legs, Ginger, and bash his brains out against the wall. He ain't worth wasting a bullet on!"

Wad advanced and helped himself to Jim-Bob's belt and gun while Ginger kept him covered.

"Where's the rest of the boys, Jim-Bob?" asked the redhead.

Jim-Bob swallowed before he could answer. "Gone to—to the funeral," he faltered.

"And when they get back," announced Wad ominously, "they'll find the makin's of another funeral waiting for 'em. Yuh'll make a right handsome corpse, Jim-Bob."

Jim-Bob shivered. "Yuh—yuh ain't going for to—"

"Don't shiver," advised Wad. "In a minute it'll be the heat that's bothering yuh, not the cold!"

CHAPTER VIII

The Battle of the Blizzard

THE color slowly drained from Jim-Bob's face.

"Aw, c'mon, boys," he whined. "Yuh wouldn't—"

"My motto," interrupted Ginger, scowling, "is, 'Do unto others as they've tried to do unto you.' Yesterday, Jim-Bob, yuh cooked up a beautiful little scheme to keep the wolves from starving by turning me into a wolf-breakfast. They didn't miss much, 'cause I'm almighty tough. But yore carcass looks to be powerful tender. Yuh'd make a dainty morsel of lobo-chow, Jim-Bob. Can't yuh just picture one of them big, ga'nt gray-backs gnawing on one of yore drumsticks?"

Jim-Bob shuddered. "Yuh—yuh wouldn't dast—"

"I wouldn't?" roared Ginger, pretending to be in a blood-thirsty rage. "I'll show yuh, yuh damned polecat! Hogtie him, Wad, and after we look round and collect all the guns, we'll start him on his way to where it ain't below zero!"

Jim-Bob began to blubber, but in a moment he was securely bound. Ginger and Wad searched the bunkhouse

and the unburnt half of the ranch house, but found no more weapons.

"Now," directed Ginger, "you sashay back and tell the Skipper that it's safe to come ahead with the drive. I'll mosey along and see can I sneak up on the gunmen guarding the gorge —if they is anybody guarding it."

"And leave Jim-Bob safe and warm in the bunkhouse?" protested Wad indignantly. "I'm so short my feet don't touch the ground, but I can think up ninety-six ways to make him wish he'd never—"

"Forget it!" advised Ginger. "The important thing is to shove the drive through the gorge. We ain't got any time to waste on Jim-Bob. He couldn't be any more scared than he is now if a noose was round his gozzle! Make tracks, yuh blood-thirsty badger. Scoot!"

Wad scat. But before he was out of hearing he began to howl like a timber wolf to ease Jim-Bob's feelings. Ginger hit it up at a high lope, leaving the trail and heading through the timbered hills, aiming to circle round and take the guards from the rear. He was unfamiliar with the lay of the land and was forced to ride an extra mile to get around an impassable draw, drifted twenty feet deep with snow.

And then, unexpectedly, he heard a sudden outburst of gunfire. The shots were barely audible and, because of the blizzard, seemed strangely flat and unnatural. The storm seemed to have the same muffling effect on the sound as does a heavy fog, for it was impossible for him to tell from which direction the sound came.

"But shooting can mean only one thing," he told himself uneasily. "It's a clash between our boys and Crosho's. And the only place that that could happen is at the head of the gorge. Something's gone wrong!"

For a moment he was undecided whether to return and join the fight or to continue in search of the guards. He finally decided that he must have gone too far and that the drive had headed into Crosho's trap while he was circling the drifted draw. His mind made up, he struck back through the timber toward the head of the gulch, still determined to take the enemy from behind, if possible.

He swung over to the rim of the gorge and followed it back until at last he reached the spot where the cliff angled back from the Big Johnson, leaving the little park in which was situated the Tincup headquarters. Up on the heights the wind was so terrific that it almost snatched him out of the saddle.

Below, dimly visible through the light veil of wind-wrangled snowflakes, he could make out the Six Slash Six critters—not strung out, now, as when they were on the move, but bunched and restlessly milling, little more than a rifle's shot from the spot where he was. Two or three of the Skipper's hands were keeping them close-herded, but at first he could see nothing of the others.

Then he discerned one, and then another, crouching behind boulder and tree, blazing away with their Winchesters in the direction of the gorge. He could hear answering gunshots from a spot directly beneath him. But the summit was shaped like a dome, and he dared not go nearer the edge.

A bullet whizzed past him, warning him to make himself scarce. With a start, he realized that it had come from the Six Slash Six crew. He knew that they could see him dimly through the snow, but could not recognize him.

With an exclamation of irritation, he kneed his horse back into the timber. Had the brink of the cliff been sharp and abrupt, he might have fired down upon the defenders of the gorge. But its domelike slant prevented him from getting near the edge and proved a perfect defense against an attack from the rear, such as he had planned. Dismounting, he crouched in the snow to watch. But there was little that

he could do from that vantage point.

He was forced to ride three-quarters of a mile before the cliff shelved off into a slant which permitted descent. Meanwhile the battle was raging beneath him, yet he could take no part in it. He was fuming with impatience to take a hand in the scrap.

Once on the flats below, he made out the stronghold of Crosho's men. It was a veritable fortress, halfway up the face of the cliff at the exact head of the gorge. A slanting ledge afforded a means of approach on the near side, but petered out on the far side of the spot where the defenders were barricaded. Above, the bulging cliff overhung it. From behind the wall of stones which had been built along the outer edge of the ledge, the guards could command a clear view of the gorge. No one could pass without being seen.

Ginger groaned as he sized up the situation. The position of Crosho's gunmen seemed impregnable. One man with a Winchester, entrenched in such a fortress, could prevent the passage of the drive by picking off one rider after another. And there seemed to be at least a dozen men crouching in safety behind that wall, banging away at the Six Slash Six. So far as Ginger could see, there wasn't a way in the world to rout them out. And so long as they weren't driven out, the drive could not pass through the gorge.

He lined out straight toward the Six Slash Six, waving his hat and yelling so that they would not mistake him for one of the enemy. Twice a thirty-thirty slug from the gorge defenders kicked up the snow within a few yards of him, but he did not waste shells returning the fire.

He found Wad crouched behind a snow-covered log, slinging hot lead and hotter taunts at the enemy as fast as he could pump his gun and work his jaw. Both seemed equally effective.

"I told yuh so!" he yelled at Ginger. "I told yuh what would happen if I lost my lucky hatband!"

"What *did* happen?" demanded Ginger.

"Well, yuh talked so daggoned fierce about tossing Jim-Bob to the wolfs that I thought yuh was in earnest. Figgering we was coming back after him in a minute, I tied his hands and feet, but didn't tie him to a bunk post, like I would of done if I'd knowed we was going to leave him. He done burned the ropes by pressing 'em against that red-hot stove and waltzed over and warned the guards. And now look at us! I may be so daggoned short that I got to walk like a turtle, but I ain't so slow that I—"

"What of it?" asked Ginger. "We couldn't of got past them guards, anyway. Let's get busy and figger ourselves outa this!"

"I'd swear the wind's blowing so daggoned hard that it'd blow their bullets right back at 'em, but it ain't," bemoaned Wad. "If I only had my snakeskin—"

He broke off suddenly with a sharp cry of "Looky!" and pointed toward the gorge. Crosho's gunmen, not content with merely guarding the gorge, had launched a sortie with the apparent purpose of stampeding the Six Slash Six critters. The herd was in a perilous position, on a flat within a hundred yards of a twelve-foot drop-off above the brakes of the river bank. Once they were stampeded over that little bluff, there would be no drive left for the Skipper to worry about.

Shouting to Wad to follow, Ginger fed his pony the steel and lined out toward the herd. But Wad had left his horse in the protection of some cottonwoods forty yards away, and he was not built to make speed afoot.

Crosho's raiders were streaking it straight for the herd, paralleling the bank of the stream. Ginger was well off on the flank. He knew that he might possibly drop one or perhaps two of the horsemen before they

reached the cattle if he brought his Winchester into use. But what purpose would that serve, if the rest reached the herd and stampeded it? As he sped toward the rear of the bunched critters at a headlong gallop, he wriggled from his coat.

One of the raiders' horses went down beneath the fire of the Six Slash Six men, but the next moment the raiders had burst through the thin cordon and were bearing down on the milling herd, shooting and yelling.

The Six Slash Six hands who had been left to guard the critters might have prevented a worse disaster, but they kept their heads. If they had beaten the raiders to it by stampeding the herd back upstream, they could have saved them, for the whitefaces would not have traveled far in face of the terrific wind. Instead, the herders advanced to meet Crosho's men. The banging of their own guns alone probably would have started the stampede.

As the raiding party swept down upon the critters, Ginger was racing in from the flank to cut in behind the panicky whitefaces. He saw two or three of them break away on a lumbering, terrified run, straight for the bluff. A moment later every last critter was on the move, terrified by the pandemonium of shooting and yelling. Even the howling of the wind failed to drown out the drumming thunder of their hoofs and the clash of their horns.

Ginger cut across barely a length in front of the leaders and then swerved his pony sharply. He was now between the terrified animals and the bluff. If he failed to turn them he was simply out of luck, due to be ground beneath their feet or forced over the jump-off, to be buried under an avalanche of beef. . . .

He dropped the bridle reins over the horn and, controlling his pony solely by the pressure of his knees, began waving his coat violently with one hand and shooting into the air with the other, meanwhile shouting at the top of his lungs. He turned the leader, and the second and third. But the fourth was a bunch-quitter with a mind of his own and refused to be turned. Ginger killed him with the last shot in his six-gun.

But now that the leaders were turned, the rest followed in their tracks. Ginger kept waving his coat, hazing them away from the bluff and heading them upstream. The sally of Crosho's men had turned the Six Slash Six drive into an utter rout, but had failed to destroy the herd. Ginger knew that the critters would keep running until the wind slowed them down, or until they bogged down in some drift. He had little fear that Crosho's crew would follow far. They had failed to destroy the entire herd by stampeding it over the bluff, and the few they might shoot down would not be worth the risk of being cut off from their base.

Just then Wad came galloping in, whooping like a madman.

"Man alive!" he bellowed. "We shore saved them critters in the nick of time, didn't we? I'm just a—"

"Muffle yore bazoo and come with me!" snapped Ginger. "This is the chanct of a lifetime to cut in behind 'em and grab the gorge! If we can sneak into that cliff fort of their'n, we can hold off a million of 'em and let the Skipper take his own sweet time about collecting the herd and driving 'em through!"

The rest of the Six Slash Six crew was utterly demoralized and scattered to the winds as Ginger and Wad streaked it straight back down toward the gorge. But a moment later a cry went up from the enemy. Instantly Crosho's riders abandoned their pursuit of the herd and turned back after the two racing horsemen, shooting as they rode.

A bullet zipped past Ginger's head. To his consternation he noted that it came from the gorge fortress. Too

late he realized that Crosho's crew had not been caught napping, but had left a couple of men behind to guard their fortress. He and Wad were caught squarely between two fires!

Behind them there were a dozen gunmen. Ahead there were but two. And so Ginger, bending low over the horn, sped straight on toward the gorge. Bullets buzzed all about them, kicking up the snow beside them. As he neared the head of the gorge, he cut in close, riding smack along the base of the cliff.

He was hoping that the gunmen behind the barricade would be unable to depress their rifles sufficiently to drill them if they hugged the base of the cliff. To wing them, these two would be forced to lean out over their wall of stones and shoot straight downward, which would be difficult shooting at best.

A moment later they thundered past beneath the fortress, without a shot being fired at them from above. Now that they were cut off from the rest of the Six Slash Six crew, the horsemen abandoned the chase for fear of being lured so far away from their base that the Skipper might re-form his scattered forces and launch a new and successful attack.

"Well," panted Wad, "we got through all right. But now that we're here, where are we? Cut off from the drive and without the chanct of a fiddler's witch to run the gauntlet and get back again!"

CHAPTER IX

Heir to the Tincup

"WHAT good could we do if we *did* get back?" retorted Ginger. "Our critters are scattered from here to hellangone, and it'll take hours to gather 'em in. Lemme think a minute. I'm getting an idea. . . . For why should we go back, anyways? Me and you, we're heading for Johnson City!"

Wad stared at him incredulously. "And desert our pals? The blizzard musta gone to yore head, or something!"

"Listen, Wad. Can you keep yore mouth shut? About the killing of Trent, I mean. If yuh can, I got a scheme to save the Skipper's herd!" As the wondering Wad nodded, Ginger drew Trent's letter from his pocket and handed it over to his companion.

"Well, I'll be piled!" he exclaimed when he had read it. "You—*you* are Trent's stepson!"

"Yep," confirmed Ginger. "The only reason I didn't tell the world before was because it would of looked funny, after me killing Trent. Yuh know I done it in self-defense, Wad. But nobody suspicions me. If you'll forget what yuh seen, I'm going to Johnson City. When the will is read, I'm going to claim the Tincup, and when I got it, I'm going to let the Skipper through!"

Wad began to cuss enthusiastically. "That's the ticket, Ginger! Yuh can count on me to stay dumb—not the way most folks mean 'dumb,' 'cause everybody knows I'm from Powder River and smart as a quirt, but dumb like a sand lizard that can't say anything with his mouth!"

An hour later they rode into Johnson City. The first thing Ginger did was to send Wad after Rita, to bring her to the office of Lawyer Laska, where Trent's will was to be read. Wad insisted that he'd see himself somewhere else before he told her that the attempt to get through the gorge had failed, and he left trying to think up some good, plausible lie to tell her. He was instructed to wait with her outside the lawyer's office until Ginger summoned them.

Hurrying to the lawyer's office, Ginger encountered Sheriff Stark and at once decided to take the officer with him. "They tell me yo're square and ain't taking sides in the Boreas Basin feud, Sheriff," he said hurriedly. for

he feared he might be too late. "I wisht yuh'd trail along with me and see that Crosho and the funeral mourners don't gang up on me. I can take care of myself if they try to gun-gang me, as I reckon I've already demonstrated, but I don't want to plug any of 'em less'n I have to. If yo're present, they ain't likely to try any rough stuff."

"What's it all about?" queried the sheriff doubtfully.

"I ain't got time to explain—I may be too late now," said Ginger hurriedly. "C'mon—you'll find out!"

As Ginger pushed through the door of the lawyer's office, Crosho, who was seated amid a group of his Flying H cohorts, leaped to his feet angrily. But at the sight of the sheriff he subsided. The lawyer was standing at the head of a table, reading, but he ceased at the interruption, frowning.

"What," demanded Crosho angrily, "is the reason for horning in here?"

"I'm kinda interested in what that will says," grinned Ginger. "They ain't no law to keep folks that's interested from hearing a will read, is they?"

"There isn't," frowned the lawyer. "Sit down." And he resumed his reading:

"—and I give, demise and bequeath, absolutely and without reservation, all of my estate, real, personal and mixed, of whatsoever kind and nature of which I may die seized and possessed, unto my stepson, Frank Fortune."

Lawyer Laska cleared his throat. "That is the conclusion of Trent's last will and testament, gentlemen. It is properly signed and witnessed."

Ginger was both puzzled and elated. His stepfather had left him not only the half he had promised him, but the other half as well. Why, then, had Trent tried to murder him? Crosho extended his hand to a nervous, sandy-haired youth who sat alongside him, and said:

"Congratulations, Frank! Yuh just stepped into a first-rate piece of property."

"Whoa, there!" broke in Ginger excitedly. "Ain't yuh got off on the wrong foot, Crosho? *I'm* Frank Fortune, heir to the Tincup!"

A gasp arose from the assemblage. The sheriff and the lawyer stared incredulously from one redhead to the other. To Ginger, Crosho's plot was plain enough. Having failed to induce Ginger to "impersonate" the heir, he had found another man with red hair to act as his catspaw by claiming to be Trent's stepson.

"It's a lie!" exploded Crosho furiously, leaping to his feet. "This feller that calls hisself Ginger is nothing but a cheap crook who is trying to hoodle yuh into believing he's the heir! He's trying to impersonate Trent's real stepson, who sets here by my side. I demand that yuh throw him in jail, Sheriff!"

Ginger grinned. He knew Crosho never dreamed he was the real heir, but undoubtedly believed he was an impostor trying to turn to his own advantage the plot Crosho himself had suggested the day before.

"If I can't prove I'm Frank Fortune, I'm perfectly willing to be jailed, Sheriff—if yuh promise to jail that other claimant if *he* can't prove *his* case! Let's both lay our cards on the table, and let the sheriff and the lawyer decide which is square and which is crooked. Fair enough?"

"Fair enough," agreed the sheriff, after a nod from the lawyer. "Yo're first, Ginger. Where's yore proof?"

Ginger stepped to the door, wondering if Wad and Rita had shown up yet. To his relief they were just approaching. With a nod he signaled the puzzled girl to enter.

"Rita," he began, I want yuh to—"

"Wait!" interrupted the lawyer. "I'll do the questioning! I don't propose to have any leading questions!"

"Fair enough," shrugged Ginger. "Ask her if she ever knowed me before I showed up in this country, and what was my real name."

"Just a moment," said Lawyer Las-

ka, clearing his throat. "The young lady doubtless is ignorant of what it is all about, so I'll explain. . . . Miss, we have just finished reading Branson Trent's will, which leaves his entire estate, consisting of the Tincup ranch, to his stepson. This young man who is known as Ginger claims to be Trent's stepson—which claim, if substantiated, would give him possession of the Tincup. He is calling upon you to identify him as the first step in proving—"

"Stop!" interrupted Rita, her eyes suddenly blazing with anger. "I refuse to be a party to such a fraud! No word of mine shall aid an impostor to put through such a crooked deal!"

Ginger gasped. Rita's unexpected and startling reaction left him utterly flabbergasted. Before he could say a word she turned on him furiously, stamping her foot.

"You—you despicable crook!" she cried, her eyes blazing. "You cowardly snake in the grass! I understand everything, now! You are nothing but a traitor and a spy! All the time you were working for dad you were plotting with his worst enemy to ruin us. And I—I thought you were so fine, and brave, and manly!"

A choking sob burst from her lips. Suddenly she turned, and before any of the startled watchers could halt her, she dashed from the room. . . .

The astounded Ginger gulped, momentarily speechless. And then, in a flash, realization of the truth swept upon him. He had told Rita the evening before that he had paid a "social" call on Crosho, and that the latter had propositioned him to impersonate Trent's heir and claim the Tincup to further Crosho's plot to ruin the Skipper.

Now he cursed the modesty which had kept him from telling her the whole truth of his capture by and subsequent escape from Crosho—an explanation which he had feared might make him out a braggart. He could see, now, that at first she had thought he was "kidding" but that the lawyer's explanation of the situation had led her to believe that he was striving to carry out Crosho's scheme—and had had the gall to ask her to testify for him and so aid in the supposed ruination of her father. Now that he realized her viewpoint, it seemed plausible enough. But her unjustified leap at a conclusion had left him bogged down in plenty of trouble! He leaped toward the door, hoping he could stop her and explain.

"Stop him, Sheriff!" bellowed Crosho. "He sees his game is up, and he's trying to make his getaway!"

Ginger felt the officer's fingers close on his arm. To struggle would merely confirm Crosho's charge that he was trying to flee. Choking back his anger, he halted and turned about. It was too late to stop Rita, anyway.

"For why should I try to beat it, Sheriff?" he asked, keeping his temper under a check rein. "Miss Rita, she didn't savvy the lay of things, and I just wanted to explain."

"Yuh've daggone nigh explained yoreself into jail, young fellow," frowned the sheriff. "Yuh said yuh was willing to be jailed if yuh couldn't prove yore case. Can yuh give any reason why I shouldn't put yuh on ice?"

"I can still prove I'm Frank Fortune, without her testimony!" flared Ginger, fishing in his pocket. "I got a letter here from my stepfather which'll prove my case!"

But he couldn't find the letter. Then he remembered that Wad had failed to return it after reading it an hour before.

"My pal's got it," he said to the sheriff. "He's waiting outside. Call him in."

The moment Wad entered the office, Crosho edged over to the sheriff and whispered to him.

"Ask him," Ginger suggested to the lawyer, "for that letter I give him an hour ago."

"Just a second, gents," interrupted

the sheriff. "I just happened to think —I got something I believe belongs to this sprung-legged louse. Wad, have yuh lost anything?"

"Me?" said Wad. "Yo're daggoned right I have, Sheriff. My rattlesnake hatband. And sinct I lost it I had more bad luck than could be cured by a bushel of hoss shoes. I'm so short my feet don't touch the ground, but I'm from Powder River, and—"

"Never mind that," interrupted the sheriff, holding forth a snakeskin hatband. "Is this it?"

"Shore is!" confirmed Wad eagerly, reaching for it. "Now my luck's come back. Where did yuh find it? Out in the street where we had the fuss with Crosho's gun-slingers yesterday?"

"It was found," announced the sheriff slowly and impressively, "alongside the murdered body of Branson Trent!"

Wad gasped, and so did Ginger, but Crosho grinned triumphantly. Ginger recalled that Wad had slammed his hat on the ground near Trent's body, as was his habit when excited. He could readily see how the band might have fallen off, and how the loss had remained undiscovered by Wad until after the subsequent clash with Crosho's gunmen.

"Who—who found it there?" asked Wad weakly.

"Crosho found it when him and his boys found the body. That was one reason they rode to town—so's they could turn it over to me as evidence of the identity of the murderer. Nobody knowed who belonged to it, then."

"It's a frame-up!" protested Wad helplessly. "How did yuh learn it was mine?"

"It seems," frowned the sheriff, "that you two high-binders pulled some sort of a dirty deal on Jim-Bob Griet in the Tincup bunkhouse this morning—tied him up, or something. After he got loose, he sent a rider to town with the word that Wad Tansy had mentioned that he'd lost his luck with his hatband. That give us our first clue—and yuh just now identified it as yore'n. Wad Tansy, I place yuh under arrest for the murder of Branson Trent!"

Two of Crosho's men seized Wad, disarmed and searched him, passing Trent's letter to Ginger over to the sheriff, who started to read it. Wad glanced helplessly at Ginger. Only an hour ago he had promised Ginger he would reveal nothing concerning the killing of Trent. Was his promise to keep him from revealing the facts which might establish his own innocence?

"That daggoned hatband's shore brought me plenty luck," Wad announced bitterly. "All of it bad!"

The unexpected and startling developments of the last few minutes had left Ginger, too, in a bog hole of trouble. He could not let Wad take the fall for a killing for which he was responsible. But now the sheriff was reading Trent's letter. If it proved Ginger's identity, it likewise provided an excellent motive for the murder of Trent—for hadn't Ginger just laid claim to his stepfather's estate? Who, in view of that letter, would believe he hadn't murdered Trent for his money?

If he saved Wad by admitting the killing, who would believe he had shot in self-defense? Who would believe Trent had been crazy enough to attack his own stepson, whom he had never seen, and to whom he had willed his estate? It would sound like the absurd excuse of a trapped criminal. And yet, he couldn't let Wad take the fall for him.

"Sheriff," he announced simply, "*I* killed Branson Trent!"

CHAPTER X

Partners of Peril

"YOU killed him?" gasped the amazed officer. "What yuh trying to do—take the fall for bandy-legs?"

"I shot him to keep from being killed. He tried to—"

"That's the truth," broke in Wad. "I witnessed it. 'Twas self-defense!"

Sheriff Stark was plainly mystified. "Do yuh still claim yo're Trent's stepson and heir—like this letter shows? If yuh do, it means yo're admitting a motive for—"

"Hold on a second, Sheriff," interrupted Crosho, grinning evilly. "Looks to me like they're *both* in on it! They both admit they was there. Naturally, both would lie their heads off to get out of it. Yuh can't believe either of 'em. Only thing yuh can do is to toss 'em both into jail. I'll take charge of the Tincup till the courts decide which heir—"

"I reckon that's the only thing to do," announced the sheriff. "Gimme yore gun, Redhead."

"Excuse me," replied Ginger quietly. "I got other arrangements."

And with that he swung from the hip and his left fist caught Crosho on the jaw and sent him staggering back against the sheriff. Simultaneously his right hand flashed upward from his holster, gripping his forty-five.

"Sorry, gents," he grinned, sweeping the room with the muzzle of his gun, "but I don't aim for me or my friend to be put in cold storage. Don't one of yuh make a move, for if yuh do it'll be a move to a warmer climate. . . . Wad, get yore gun, and then take the key outa the door and hop outside and stick it in the lock and be ready to turn it, quick, the minute I ooze out. Are yuh ready?"

Wad hopped out, and the instant Ginger followed him he slammed the door and twisted the key in the lock. He was not a sawed-off second too soon, for bullets began splintering through the door as quickly as those inside could draw. A chorus of angry shouts could be heard amidst the uproar of gunfire. But Ginger and Wad had bolted for the street.

Ginger knew that the locked door would delay the pursuit only for a few moments. It would soon be smashed down, and those inside would come boiling out like a pack of baying hounds. He hoped, however, to get enough of a start so that they could beat their pursuers to the rough country, where he was confident he and Wad could ditch them. He was heading for The Pride of the Rockies, where they had left their ponies at the hitch-rail. He had forgotten Wad could sprint about as well as a tumblebug.

But Wad wasn't hampered in his choice of horses by any fine distinction of ownership. It was quite evident he'd as soon be shot for a hoss thief as for a murderer. He hopped the first hammerhead he saw and was pounding down the frozen street long before Ginger had hit the leather.

Sheriff Stark, Crosho, and the latter's gunmen came pouring into the street, yelling and shooting. All at once the street seemed to come to life, as it had the day before when the shooting had brought men popping from every door. Bullets were zipping through the air as Ginger squeezed himself low against the horn and larruped his pony down the main street.

As he passed the last house and reached the beginning of the sagebrush flats, he looked over his shoulder to see if Wad were following. But a group of townsmen, believing that the bank had been robbed and the stick-ups were escaping, had piled into the street after Ginger had galloped past and had cut down on Wad, who had veered into a side street to escape their fire.

"I wisht he was with me," panted Ginger, "but I reckon it's as well for both of us that he ain't. If I ride one way and Wad another, we'll be a heap harder to catch than if we stuck together."

From the confusion of running, yelling men which filled the street, Ginger saw a group of horsemen led by Crosho break away and come tear-

ing after him, but he could not "raise" the sheriff. Crosho didn't care two whoops and a holler about catching Wad, but he had every reason in the world for wanting to snag the redhead, whose bold play had come so near to upsetting his plans; nor did he care to be bothered by the presence of the sheriff if he succeeded in overhauling him.

And so he had called to his riders to follow him and had lined out in hot pursuit of Ginger. But Sheriff Stark wanted one as much as the other, and when he saw Crosho and his men take after Ginger, he had no choice but to follow Wad. Calling to one or two of the mounted townsmen to join him, he lined out on the trail of the Powder River pollywog.

Ginger speedily realized that he had his work cut out for him if he made good his escape. He was not mounted on his own pony, which he had been forced to abandon the night before when escaping from Crosho. This was one of the Six Slash Six string, good enough for hazing a drive of cow brutes, but nothing to write home about when it came to speed. In fact, Crosho himself was gradually closing the gap between them.

Before long the thirty-thirty slugs were zinging about his ears again and sputting into the snow uncomfortably close. Ginger yanked the Winchester from the saddle scabbard and prepared to swap lead for lead. And so it was that he was looking over his shoulder and failed to see the rider who appeared out of the driving storm, squarely ahead of him. It was Jim-Bob, riding to town to tell his father of the rout of the Six Slash Six.

Jim-Bob slipped to the ground and, kneeling, took careful aim at the approaching horseman. The next thing Ginger knew was that he didn't know anything. For Jim-Bob's bullet had dropped his horse and sent him catapulting into the air, to crash on the frozen ground on his head, unconscious.

When the redhead recovered his senses, it was to hear Crosho and Jim-Bob heatedly arguing as to his fate. He kept his eyes closed and 'possumed it. Jim-Bob, as usual, was hollering for instant death.

"But yuh say he escaped after the sheriff done arrested him for the murder of Trent," protested the younger Griet. "Can't yuh see that leaves us a perfect 'out?' We got a right to shoot an escaping murderer! In fact, it's our bounden duty to do it. I'll put a bullet through his skull if yo're too squeamish. Then we'll ride to town and say we shot him while he was trying to escape, and the sheriff nor nobody else can raise a kick!"

Crosho snorted. "Jim-Bob, if brains was dollars, yuh'd be a bankrupt! I told yuh this redhead claimed to be Trent's real stepson, and, condemn it all, I half believe he is! How'd he get that letter from Trent? If he's the real Frank Fortune, it's just like somebody dumped a wagonload of ten-dollar gold pieces into our arms. Can't yuh see? They's *one* person that knows. We'll take him to that person, and if the redhead turns out to be the real heir to the Tincup, then we can work on him. All we need is his signature and the Tincup's ours—and the Skipper is wrecked. They's plenty of ways of making him come through!"

"But they don't always work, as yuh know from experience," protested Jim-Bob.

"Well, they's a chanct it'll work this time. And if it don't we won't be no worse off. We're taking him to the line camp, see? If it turns out he ain't the real stepson, I promise yuh can have him to turn into wolf bait. Or, if he is the real stepson and won't play our game, then yuh can have him, just the same. . . . Boys, load him onto a hoss."

Ginger decided that it was time to

come to his senses. Lashed across the back of a horse, it would not be beyond the bounds of possibility that he might freeze to death or at least incur frost-bitten hands and feet. And so he groaned and opened his eyes.

Presently, with his hands tied to the horn and his feet linked by ropes under the horse's belly, he found himself riding through the blizzard again, surrounded by Crosho, Jim-Bob and their gunmen. Crosho's crack that there was *one* person who could identify him left him guessing. The only person he knew who could swear that he was Frank Fortune was Rita herself. He thought it unlikely that the Griets would appeal to the daughter of their worst enemy, or that she would have any trucklings with them if they did. But his head was throbbing too much to strain his brain by worrying. It was so bitterly cold that his brain seemed as numb as his bound hands.

After a long time they reached a dugout built in a bleak hillside, opposite an empty pole corral. Wind-whipped smoke coming from the chimney revealed that it was occupied, although Ginger had seen no cattle ranging near the line camp. The redhead's feet were untied, and he was pushed through the door of the shack.

It was gloomy inside, but he could make out three men. Two were armed cowhands, evidently Crosho's men. The third, plainly their prisoner, was unarmed, and his wrists were bound together. His jaws were covered by a shaggy beard, sprinkled with gray, and his face was pallid with the unhealthy white of one recovering from a long illness. But at sight of Crosho he squared his shoulders and lifted his chin, and his cavernous dark eyes flashed defiantly. A gent with his full share of guts, Ginger decided—one who might be easy-going and friendly and trusting, but one who had an unbustable spirit when put to the test. Perhaps because they were prisoners together Ginger took a liking to the fellow.

"Well," sneered Crosho as his men crowded through the door behind him, "are yuh ready to come through, fella?"

"Go to hell!" advised the bearded prisoner huskily.

Crosho spat, then pushed Ginger forward roughly. "Is this Frank Fortune?" he demanded abruptly.

Again the prisoner advised Crosho curtly where he could go. The elder Griet's face darkened angrily. "Heat up the poker, boys," he directed. "Heat it red-hot."

"You ought to know by this time, Griet," spoke up the bearded prisoner defiantly, "that torture won't work—on me! Ever since you shot me through the arm—"

"Shut up!" thundered Crosho. "I've done reached the end of my patience! I'm going to stake you and this redhead out for the wolves—"

He broke off suddenly as the door was pushed open and a deep voice boomed:

"Speaking of wolfs, gents, I'm a wolf from Powder River, and I'm plumb due to go on the rampage! Claw the ceiling, yuh hellcats! I'm so short my feet don't touch the ground, but I'm p'ison mean, and I'd as soon shoot yuh as look at yuh! I'm Wad Tansy, which means the same as dynamite! I'm a ring-tailed, rip-snorting hellion, and I chaw my meat raw and prefer human meat, at that! I—"

One of Crosho's men grabbed for his holster. Wad's gun roared, and the fellow staggered back against the wall, moaning with pain.

"Step up, yuh polecats!" invited Wad. "Step up and take it, one at a time or all together! Don't be bashful. Who's next? Who wants to suicide hisself by riling Wad Tansy when he's on the rampage?"

But none cared to face the gun of the bowlegged buckaroo in the doorway.

"You Crosho—and you, Jim-Bob," pleaded Wad in a piteous bellow. "Won't either of yuh please crook a little finger so's I'll have an excuse to drill yuh? As a special favor to a little feller whose feet don't touch the ground, won't yuh make a play for yore guns so's I can kill yuh?"

Crosho was raging, but he dared not make a move. Jim-Bob, ashen of face, shrank back against the wall.

"All right, Ginger," sighed Wad. "If they won't fight, yuh'll have to shuck their hardware off'n 'em. Can yuh do it with yore forepaws tied?"

Ginger's wrists were tied, but he could use his fingers to lift the six-guns from the holsters of Crosho and his men. "I dassn't lower my gun to untie yuh, Ginger," said Wad, "so—"

"I'll untie you," volunteered the bearded prisoner, "if you're an enemy of the Griets!"

Like Ginger, his wrists were bound, but his fingers were free. In a moment the redhead was free, and he, in turn, freed the bearded prisoner. "I don't know who yuh are," said Ginger hurriedly, "but if Crosho was keeping yuh prisoner, it's a shore sign yo're okay. Grab one of them guns. Yo're coming with us!"

"Hurry!" urged Wad. "I done shook the sheriff easy as pie and cut in on yore trail to see could I help yuh. But he's liable to catch up with us any minute, and if he does—"

"—if he does, he'll find a mess of gunless gunmen!" finished Ginger as he ducked outside with the surplus forty-fives. The rescued prisoner darted after him and started untying the horses tethered at the corral rail. Then, as Wad backed out the door, a gun roared at a window. Someone—probably one of the two guards—had had an extra gun hidden somewhere in the cabin. Wad's gun began to blaze. Ginger, already in the saddle, cut loose with his captured weapon, covering Wad's retreat as he hit the leather. Ginger had hoped to turn the remaining horses loose, but the fire from the dugout was getting too hot.

"C'mon!" bellowed Wad as he fed his pony the rowels. And a moment later the three of them were high-tailing it away into the blizzard.

CHAPTER XI

Storm's End

GINGER followed Wad's lead, for he had no idea where they were. He tried to question the rescued prisoner, but the icy gale whipped the words from his lips. Under the best of circumstances, men cannot carry on a conversation while riding at a headlong gallop.

A shot sounded behind them, and another. Ginger had disarmed the enemy of their six-guns, but they had had no time to scatter the horses. And each horse carried a Winchester in the saddle scabbard. Crosho and his gunmen were in headlong pursuit, but instead of following tight on their trail, they were spreading out to the right—and the fleeing trio were not gaining an inch!

"They're trying to head us into a bend of the Big Johnson," gasped Wad as Ginger drew abreast of him. "If they do, we're trapped! We'll have to stop and fight it out with 'em, 'cause we can't get acrost!"

Crosho's riders were spreading more and more, but now as they spread they lost distance and were dropping behind. Secure in the belief that their quarry was trapped in the river bend, they were content to take their time and draw a cordon through which none could escape. And then, presently, the fleeing trio emerged on the low bluff above the river.

"Who said we couldn't get acrost?" cried Ginger excitedly, pointing. "Look!"

An eager cry burst from Wad's lips. "She's plumb froze over! Never sinct I been in the basin has it been cold enough to freeze the main channel! The Six Slash Six range is on t'other

side! If the ice is only strong enough to hold us. . . ."

With Ginger in the lead, they slid their horses down the bluff. At the edge of the stream Ginger slid to the ground. Tossing one end of his lariat to Wad, so that he could be pulled out if the ice crashed beneath his feet, he started cautiously across. A moment later, safe on the other side, he watched Wad tie the rope to the neck of Ginger's pony. Then, after the horse had crossed safely, proving the ice over the main channel to be solid, the other two followed, leading their ponies.

Presently all three were on solid ground and in the saddle once more, splitting the breeze toward the Six Slash Six. They saw no sign of Crosho's men, who quite evidently were taking their time in closing in the jaws of their supposed trap.

"I got an idea!" proclaimed Ginger enthusiastically. "The swellest idea ever was! For why—"

But it was useless to shout against a frigid wind which snatched the words from his lips. He was forced to keep his idea until they finally rode up to the Six Slash Six, where they found the Skipper with his cattle rounded up. The boss was in the depths of despair.

"I thought they'd got yuh, boys," he said dispiritedly. "I'm glad yo're okay, but we're licked—plumb licked! Who's that stranger with yuh? Where yuh been? But it don't matter. We're all ruined."

"The hell we are!" cried Ginger exultantly. "I ain't got no time to explain anything, 'cause we got to get them critters on the move! Don't yuh see? We don't have to shove 'em through the gorge! The river's plumb froze over! We can haze 'em acrost the ice—and onct we're on t'other side, it's open range and all plain sailing till we get 'em safe down on the plains range!"

The Skipper stared at him, speechless, for a moment. Gradually the light of hope began to dawn in his eyes.

"We can do it!" Ginger blurted excitedly. "The three of us just crossed on the ice from t'other side! If it held a hoss, it'll hold a steer!"

Suddenly the Skipper was galvanized into action. "Curly! Bud! Baldy! Get the rest of the boys and pile out and get them critters on the move! . . . What? No, not toward the gorges! Towards the river. The Big Johnson's bridged over with ice, and we're going to haze the Six Slash Six critters acrost if we got to fit 'em all with skates!"

In two cracks of a quirt-lash the whole ranch was a-bustle with activity. Drooping cowhands were transformed magically into whooping buckaroos, eager to snatch victory from the hands of defeat. Speedily the whitefaces were prodded into motion again.

"What in the name of the bobtailed bearcat," Wad asked Ginger at the first opportunity, "happened to make Miss Rita come spouting outa the law wrangler's office, crying like her heart was bust?"

"She figgered I was trying to swoggle the Skipper. She never give me a chanct to explain. If I only could of got a dozen words with her—"

"Yo're liable to have yore chanct, yet. As she skyrocketed past me she was sobbing that her pa was the only friend she had left in the world, and she was heading straight home again to stick with him to the bitter end. I'd told her a top-of-the-herd lie, but I reckon it didn't take, 'cause she said she knowed the Skipper had failed to run the gorge, else you wouldn't of been in town trying to frame him."

The crossing of the Big Johnson was a tedious job, for they dared not shove the herd across in a bunch for fear the ice would not hold their weight. Working with feverish haste, they snaked the critters across one at

a time. Many of them lost their footing on the slick surface and had to be roped and dragged across on their backs. All but the drag end were on the farther bank when a buckboard containing Rita and the one-legged cook clattered up from the rear, just as a bullet came whining into the midst of the Six Slash Six horsebackers.

Ginger guessed that Crosho and his riders, after closing the jaws of their trap and discovering that their quarry had escaped, had dispatched parties up and down the river in search of them. One of these parties had come upon the Skipper's crossover and had opened fire.

"Only thing we got to guard against," he told the Skipper hurriedly, "is another stampede. There can't be many of 'em this time, and they ain't got the advantage of a fortress, now. Lemme take Wad and all the boys yuh don't need to finish shoving the critters acrost, and I'll guarantee we'll either run 'em off or tie 'em into a double bow knot!"

The Skipper dodged as another bullet hummed over his head.

"Go to it," he directed. "But don't start shooting until yo're far enough away so's not to panic the cattle again. All I ask is that yuh drive Crosho's men back outa rifle range—and I'll do the rest. Onct we get all our critters acrost and on the move in open country, all hell can't stop us!"

Ginger and his raiders, eager to wipe out the defeat at the gorge, spurred their horses up the bluff and, once on top, charged straight toward the party of gun-slingers who had posted themselves on the rim.

This time Crosho found himself outnumbered. Ginger had pinked four of his men in the preceding day's clash in Johnson City, one had been wounded during the battle of the gorge, and another by Wad when he had rescued Ginger. Of those remaining, some had been left to guard the gorge. Of the party which had pursued Ginger from town, half had been dispatched in the opposite direction to search for the fugitives. Now Crosho turned his guns on the charging cavalcade.

But Ginger's riders gave as much as they got, or better, shooting as they rode and pouring a storm of hot lead into the enemy. Jim-Bob was the first to show the white feather by hopping his horse and lighting out. Once he had begun to retreat, the others, except for Crosho, broke for their horses. And Crosho, however much he might have wished to stand and fight it out, could not do it alone, and was forced to join in the rout.

With a whoop the Six Slash Six horsebackers took after the fleeing foe, shooting as they rode. One of the fleeing riders threw up his arms and then toppled from the saddle and crashed to the ground. Ginger didn't realize that it was Jim-Bob until Crosho, shouting to his men, wheeled his horse and headed back to the rescue of his fallen son.

But Crosho's routed riders had lost their appetite for battle, now that the odds were in their favor no longer. They abandoned Crosho and Jim-Bob to their fate, their only thought to outride those menacing bullets. Crosho leaped from his horse, striving to lift Jim-Bob from the ground and into the saddle. A moment later he found himself ringed about by armed horsemen.

It was an elated bunch of Six Slash Six hands who rode back to the Skipper with their two prisoners. Crosho's hands were tied and lashed to the saddle horn. Jim-Bob was suffering from a bullet wound in the hip. No longer did the Six Slash Six need to fear the Rocking H, for they held the owners as hostages. There was nothing left but to move the drive the remaining few miles to the prairie country where feed was plentiful.

As the whooping raiders triumphantly rejoined the Skipper, Ginger saw a group of strangers. But he failed to spot one among them as Sheriff Stark. In fact, in the excitement of his capture, escape, the crossing, and the final battle with Crosho's crew, he had clean forgotten that he and Wad were wanted by the law—until now the sheriff and his posse of townsmen suddenly whipped out their guns and covered the newcomers.

"Yuh shook me, easy, Spraddlelegs," he growled at Wad. "But when I heard this shooting, I knowed that one or both of yuh was bound to be mixed up in it. You, Ginger, and you, Wad, grab a handful of snowflakes, 'cause yuh've done reached the turning of the trail that leads to jail! Yuh lousy killers, yuh—"

"Killers!" gasped the Skipper in amazement. "What d'yuh mean? Jim-Bob's only wounded! Crosho started the fight—"

"I mean," scowled the sheriff, "that the redhead and the runt with the sprung legs are under arrest for the murder of Branson Trent! Ginger is his stepson—and he's already confessed!"

"Just a second, Sheriff," broke in the bearded stranger, pushing forward. "If anybody confessed killing Trent, he must have exaggerated slightly. Because, yuh see, *I'm* Branson Trent!"

"You?" cried the mystified sheriff. "Yo're crazy, man! Trent was murdered yesterday! I seen his carcass with my own—"

"Let me speak my piece and I'll convince you," smiled Trent. "Several weeks ago I bought the Tincup from the widow of the former owner and immediately wrote to my stepson to join me. I—"

"Is this the letter yuh wrote him?" demanded the sheriff, drawing forth the letter Ginger had produced when the will was read.

"That's it!" announced Trent. "I can prove it by writing out a sample of my handwriting for you. When I arrived to take possession, Crosho Griet invited me to his place before anyone else had seen me. He was very eager to buy the Tincup from me. When I refused, he threatened me. I hit him and he shot me through the arm. Since that time he has kept me prisoner in a line camp, trying by every means at his command, including torture, to force me to sign a deed conveying the Tincup to him. Of course I refused, for I was convinced that as soon as he had my signature he would kill me. . . . My deed to the Tincup is on file in the recorder's office. Crosho took all my other papers, including my will. That's all I know about the case."

An exclamation burst from Ginger's lips. "I see it all, now! When Crosho couldn't get my stepdad to deed the Tincup to him, he got one of his crooked friends to impersonate him! He could get away with it, 'cause nobody hereabouts had ever seen Branson Trent and never doubted that the impostor was the real owner! Maybe Crosho was scared the fake Trent would double-cross him. Anyways, he knowed he wasn't safe until title to the Tincup was in his own name. That's why he didn't dast kill the real Trent till he had got his signature on a deed! Onct he'd gotten it, he would of killed the real Trent, and the fake Trent would of disappeared. Then Crosho would of been legal owner of the Tincup, which is the key to control of the Boreas basin!"

"But—but," stammered the puzzled sheriff, "why did yuh kill the fake Trent, Ginger?"

"He must of received my letter to Trent telling I was coming. Knowing how it would jam up Crosho's game if I showed up, he started out to meet me. When I told him who I was, he tried to kill me—as Wad has told yuh. I had to nail him to keep from being killed. And self-defense is

justifiable under the law. Crosho hadn't figured on his fake Trent being killed. It left him in a hole, in case the real stepson showed up, and of course he knowed about him, 'cause he had Trent's will. He seen a chanct to turn the situation to his account by producing a fake stepson. He tried to talk me into claiming the ranch for him, but at that time I was scared to, 'count of the killing of the gent *I* thought was Trent. Don't yuh see—then Trent's signature wouldn't be necessary to convey the Tincup, 'cause the courts would transfer it to the heir. And as nobody hereabouts ever seen my signature, the fake stepson in turn would deed it to Crosho. Nobody'd suspicion it wasn't legal and on the square!"

"But," horned in the real Trent, "why did he bring you to the line camp where I was being held prisoner? I don't see—"

"Because," grinned Ginger, "when I produced yore letter at the reading of the will, it gave him an awful jolt. He thought I was a fake, but he wasn't shore. When he captured me today, he figgered to find out, certain. He didn't know that yuh'd never seen me and couldn't identify me. He figgered that if you said I was yore stepson, maybe he could talk—or torture—me into deeding the Tincup to him. That would of given him a *real* signature instead of a fake one on his deed. He didn't know whether it would work, but figgered it was worth trying. Either way, me and you would of been murdered if Wad hadn't showed up in time. Crosho had got in so deep that there was no way out except by killing both of us!"

Ginger heard a little gasp at his side and looked down to see Rita, holding out her hand.

"I'm so sorry, Ginger—so sorry that I ever doubted you!" she said.

"Forget it!" grinned Ginger, taking her hand in his. "Everybody else thought I was a fake, so how could anybody blame yuh if you did, too? Everything's turned out swell, and I've learned that stepfathers ain't as bad as they're painted and that one of 'em's a plumb swell gent! I reckon, now that I'm here, that I'll stick around a spell, Rita, and—"

"If you stick around," smiled Trent, "and take up the proposition I made you—well, I reckon I've seen enough of you to know me and you can get along together fine, so I'm ready to give you yore share of the Tincup right now!" His eyes twinkled as he regarded the redhead, who was still holding Rita's hand in his. "From the looks of things, yuh got another reason for sticking around, Ginger—and if yuh take my advice, there'll be a little lady boss to help yuh run yore share of the Tincup!"

Stephen Payne • • • • • •

tells an unusual story of the rangeland, packed with gun-roaring action, in the next-issue novel

• • • • • **EMPTY SADDLES**

NATURE'S CHILDREN

By Joseph F. Hook

Queenie was just one big, strong bear. She never bothered anyone around the Double O outfit, being a peaceful and ladylike bear at all times. However, having one of the cowboys steal her new little cub was no invitation for peace. . . . And Queenie didn't pack that brute strength for nothing.

JUST as the early spring sun arose and tinted the tips of the evergreens a delicate silver, a small clump of bushes near a deadfall moved slightly, then parted, and a huge female grizzly stepped into the open.

Like a statue she stood, not a muscle moving, with her nose uptilted to catch the familiar scent of the enemy. After a time, satisfied that all was well, her massive head swung to the right and left, and she lumbered away from the mouth of her den in a slow, rolling walk.

She showed none of the majestic beauty of the grizzly seen in paintings. On the contrary, she presented a rather sorry spectacle. The long winter hibernation had left her somewhat ragged and seedy-looking, gaunt and flat-sided. Her coat was matted and dirty, and patches of it had been rubbed loose in her turnings during the long sleep.

As she walked, her hind legs appeared to be joined with a great webb of skin which reached almost to the paws, giving her a grotesque, clumsy appearance with each movement. Her huge paws dwarfed the long, hooked claws. Across one flank was a great furrow, and another reached from her right front shoulder to the base of the neck—scars from rifle bullets.

Not far from the den she stopped and, on a patch of ground from which the snow had melted, fed lightly on the dead grasshoppers she found left over from the previous season. Her

claws tore at the dead and matted grass, and she caught a mouse in one of the numerous runways beneath.

Occasionally, she glanced back over her shoulder in the direction of the den, anxious about the cub that had come into being during the hibernation. Then, after once more sniffing the breeze, she returned to her little one, her first meal of the season having been eaten.

For the remainder of the day and part of the next, the monster grizzly remained in the den, gaining strength rapidly, repeatedly stretching her powerful muscles. Then, before the sun set on the evening of the second day, she emerged again. But this time she was not alone.

By her side was a ball of black, fuzzy fur, her cub, gazing with tiny, blinking eyes on a new world for the first time. The appearance of these two animals was startling. Nature seemed to have forgotten its infinite wisdom in the making of them; for the cub was as small in proportion as its mother was huge. That so enormous an animal would give birth to such a mite of a thing seemed unbelievable, almost ridiculous. An exact balance of proportion was lacking here.

For the first few days they did not wander far from the den, the cub not yet being spry enough to drag his funny little body over the slight obstacles in its path. But as the days began to draw out, and the sun melted the last of the snow on the lower reaches of the mountains, the cub gained in size, strength and playfulness, so that the excursions from home became longer, always, however, ending at night in the den.

Then came the day when instinct whispered to the giant bear that her cub was ready for the long trail, and together they stood at the entrance to the den, gazing down at the rolling foothills. Slowly they moved away, side by side, and the old den sheltered them no more.

On walked the grizzly, with her cub cutting crazy capers, pausing now and then to dig up the first of the spring's tender roots, or to turn over a half-rotted log in search of grubs, ants or mice, feeling secure, unseen.

Harvey Carr, owner of the Double O outfit down in the foothills, smiled to himself as the bear and her cub, cutting across an open spot in the timber, came within the range of vision of his powerful binoculars.

"Old Queenie's left her den in Dead Man's Pass, boys!" he shouted to his riders, who were busy saddling up in the corral. "The old gal's headed this way. And she's got a cub! Yes, siree! Well, I see where I get another crack at her. I'll bet I don't miss next time."

The riders came running. But Larry Boyle, the best roper in the outfit, was the only one lucky enough to catch a glimpse of the mother and cub before they entered the dense timber again.

"You're shore welcome to her, boss," he observed, handing the glasses back. "Pussonally, I ain't hankering for no sudden death. The hombre that gits that ol' gal's hide'll know he ain't been to a picnic. She's et up all the lead you tossed her way last fall, and she's ready for more. Me, I'm gonna stick to shooting rattlers. It's safer."

"I may let her alone this spring," Harvey said, "if the ranch work gits to crowding me, but I bet she'll be my meat before she dens up ag'in."

"Mebbe," Larry remarked, doubtfully. "But I'll tell you what *I'm* gonna try to do. I'm gonna ketch that cub and send it to a pal on the coast."

"Yeah," one of the riders jeered. "Jes' try it once, and they'll be shipping *you* to the coast in a wooden kimona; that is, what's left o' you when the old bear gits through mauling you."

Larry was just talking for his own benefit. Being a crack roper, he was somewhat inclined to boast. He had no intention whatever of even going

anywhere in the immediate vicinity of that mound of flesh and muscle and her cub. He had seen old Queenie on several occasions before and had lost no time getting a long way from her.

In the meantime, the grizzly and her cub went their way, working lower and lower into the foothills where the creeks ran bank-full from the spring thaw and where the food was more plentiful.

Then happened one of those rare incidents in the life of the denizens of the forest, and for which some of them pay with either their life or their liberty.

Harvey Carr's riders were far afield, riding through the timber in quest of the roving herds of cattle, with the idea of finding out their condition after passing the winter. They spread out fanwise, combing the canyons and draws carefully. On the way back they were at last forced to converge at the little bridge over Deep Creek, owing to the turbulent water which would not allow them to ford at any place they desired.

Larry Boyle was slightly in the lead when they rode across the bridge, and the roar of the water drowned the noise of their crossing. Just as they reached the other side of the creek, Larry turned suddenly in the saddle, pulled his horse up, and motioned for the others to do the same.

Almost at his horse's hoofs, cuddled down in a bed of dead alder leaves, was the grizzly's cub, sleeping soundly; while the old female, fast asleep herself, lay a short distance away and behind a clump of wild berry bushes, unseen by the riders.

The riders knew the habits of bears thoroughly, knew that Queenie could not be far away. Even then, they realized, she might be preparing to charge and scatter them right and left. The thought caused them to act promptly, and they put spurs to their horses in a wild dash away from there.

Larry glanced at the riders, then took another look at the sleeping cub. He hesitated between his desire to beat it after them and to have that cub. The latter, though, got the upper hand of his good sense, and he lost no time putting it into effect. Quite possibly the knowledge that he happened to be riding the boss' trained hunting horse might have had something to do with his mad scheme.

In a flash he had dismounted, rope in hand, and approached the cub. Squealing with fright, the little fellow was soon tied and flung across the front of the saddle, immediately after which Larry mounted and urged his animal into a fast gallop.

Just as he did so, the big grizzly raised her head. One glance through the bushes was enough to acquaint her with what had happened. She tore through the underbrush with about as much grace as an elephant and launched her massive body after the fleeing horseman.

Larry looked back over his shoulder, and the blood froze in his veins. Queenie, coming on at that deceptive gait common to her kind, was even then but a few yards in the rear. With a yell of surprise, the cowboy jerked his gun from the holster and took a snap shot at her.

The bullet struck the jaw, plowed under the hide, and passed out near her ear—a mere flesh wound. A snarl of pain and rage issued from her throat, and blood began to drip from the wound. But not for one second did she hesitate in her stride, coming on, if anything, faster than before.

Larry's second shot must have been guided by the hand of that guardian angel whose particular concern it is to watch over babes and fools. Anyway the bullet struck Queenie on the bone of the foreleg, splintering it and causing her to roll head over heels.

The pain was intense, for the huge animal bit and clawed at the wounded leg. The shock of bullet on bone had

taken all the chase out of her for the time being, and she rolled over on the ground, clawing at the earth in agony.

That was the wildest ride through timber Larry ever made; and so it was for the other men. For, on hearing the shots and seeing their crack roper break through the underbrush with a bear cub across the front of his saddle, they took it for granted that the mother bear was right then on their own horses' tails.

Spent and weary, covered with sweat and half scared to death, the riders pulled up in the yard of the Double O and cursed Larry long and luridly. Presently they calmed down and helped him to get the cub into a packing crate and placed it in the back of the mail carrier's rig, the later having driven up as they came belting in.

"Here's the address," Larry said to the carrier. "Ship that cub to this guy, and I'll settle with you later. And lemme tell you something, I've done ketched my last bear cub alive. No more for me, thank you."

"I'll say you've ketched the last one," several of the riders chorused. "We'll see to that."

BACK in the timber, sitting on her haunches with her back against a fir, Queenie rested, panting with pain. The shattered foreleg hung useless against her stomach, where it was eased of any strain on it. The bleeding had stopped, in the cheek wound as well, but the pain was excruciating.

Badly as she missed her cub, and much as she wanted to follow it and its captor, instinct warned her that her condition forbade it. Every move of her body, however slight, jarred the injured limb, so that travel at any time in the near future was out of the question.

Slowly, suffering agonies, she gradually worked back into the depth of the underbrush till she reached a deadfall. Into that she crept on three legs and remained for days, only leaving it when thirst and hunger urged her. What with the pain and the knowledge of man's nearness, she slept little, and that only with both ears cocked to catch the faintest sound. The murmur of Deep Creek would no longer act as a shield to the hunter's approach.

A month passed by before old Queenie felt that her leg had healed enough to allow her to take to the trail of her lost cub again. And then she started on it with a vengeance. Night found her close to the Double O Ranch, with her sensitive nose close to the earth, every sense alert.

The dog at the ranch set up a great barking and plunged into the timber. Queenie waited until she caught sight of it bearing down on her, its lips curled back over its fangs, hair bristling along the ridge of its back. When it dived at her, she swiped it with her tremendous paw. The dog, with a whine and yelp, sailed through the air and hit the ground with a thud, remaining motionless.

Continuing on her way, more alert than ever now, the she bear arrived at the corrals. The scent was stronger there than at any other point along the trail she had followed. But when she came opposite the bunkhouse, there was no mistaking the fact that her cub must be close by.

Almost on the very threshold of the bunkhouse she gently nosed a tiny bit of fuzzy down. A peculiar clicking sound, made by bears when pleased, broke from her. The yearning for her little one suddenly became intensified, and the maternal instinct almost drove her frantic.

Rising to her hind legs, she shattered the bunkhouse door with one blow of her mighty paw and then barged inside, wild to rescue the cub that instinct told her must be in there. In the dim light of the stable-lantern that hung from a rafter, the awakened riders gazed, horror-stricken,

at the very incarnation of their worst dreams.

When Queenie became aware of the presence of the enemy she had always hated more than anything else, her rage became a fearful thing to behold. Rising again on her hind legs, she signaled out her first intended victim, her body trembling with the roars she emitted.

The one she was moving toward was Larry Boyle. But when the bear got close, he came out of his coma of fear with a rush and took a header through the window, taking the sash with him. The rest of the men found the other windows more convenient than ever before, so that, in a few seconds, the bunkhouse was deserted. Now that the enemy had flown, the old bear began again to try to pick up the scent of her offspring. Her massive paws smashed bunks into splinters and ripped mattresses wide open.

Pandemonium reigned outside. Men in their bare feet and shirt-tails milled around and around the bunkhouse, expecting every second to see the bear spring out at them. Then they made a dash for the owner's house just as he came out on the veranda, rifle in hand, to see what all the racket was about.

The night was as black as the ace of spades, but the feeble rays from the lantern lighted up the interior of the bunkhouse enough for the men to distinguish the outlines of the busy bear. Harvey Carr put the rifle to his shoulder, took a quick sight, and fired.

The bullet inflicted another flesh wound on Queenie's body. With a snarl of rage, she turned and plunged through the doorway, while Harvey pumped lead ineffectually after her.

However, the grizzly had had enough of bullets. She knew, instinctively, that the crash of firearms meant another possible broken leg. So she made off into the timber in her limping, lumbering way and did not pause until she felt sure there was no danger of pursuit.

Nevertheless, firearms or no firearms, the old bear by no means gave up the search for her cub; the maternal instinct was far too strong for that. Besides, she knew that she was on the right trail of her missing one; that somewheres near that bunkhouse she would eventually find it.

Many more fruitless trips she made to the ranch by night, but not in so dramatic a manner as on the first occasion. Instead, she developed a cunning that would have been the envy of the wolf, stealing up quietly on those padded paws, soft and silent as the night itself, and departing at the slightest sound of life within the buildings.

And during her persistent search about the ranch, she ran into riders coming home late, from either the range or a dance. Horses sat back on their haunches, then whirled and ran, spilling the surprised men; guns split the night wide open with their bellowing. Every man's nerves were on edge, for they feared another attack on them in the bunkhouse. Finally, they got to the point where they were afraid to move an inch outside after dark, for fear of having their heads torn off by a blow from the phantomlike grizzly.

Harvey Carr was beside himself with anger. He got little or no sleep himself, and for the same reason as that of his men. He watched the riders tumble out in the morning and go about their tasks as though they were dead on their feet. And dead on their feet they were, from loss of sleep, with every promise of more of the same for a long time to come. Larry Boyle, who had been the cause of the whole mess, came in for a daily cussing from all hands.

Then, just about the time everyone had grown desperate, a strange caravan pulled up at the ranch. It consisted of prairie schooners followed by a cavalcade of riders. Bring-

ing up the rear were half a dozen pedigreed bear dogs. The men in charge shook hands with the rancher.

"I'm George Doran," he announced. "And this"—waving his hand toward the strange outfit—"is the wild and decided woolly part of the Stremo movie studio from Los Angeles. I'm the director."

"Speak yore piece," Harvey said, none too friendly, owing to loss of sleep the night before. "What you after?"

"Grizzly," Doran replied. "We want to locate one and rope it. The film ought to go over big. Do you happen to know where we could locate a bear, the bigger the better?"

"Do I!" Harvey replied with considerable fervor. "Well, I'll tell the cock-eyed world I do." He went on to tell about Queenie and finished: "She ain't so danged far away right now, the ol' nuisance! Wouldn't be a bit surprised if she was sleeping in one o' the bunks. She'd have lots o' room, 'cause my brave riders is all sleeping atop the haystack these nights."

"Any chances to borrow a couple of extra hands—good ropers?" Doran inquired.

"Help yoreself, pardner," Harvey replied. "All the boys heard what you said. They may even be jest crazy to help. There's Larry Boyle, there, for instance. Crack roper—bear cub roping's his specialty—and a brave buckaroo. He—"

"So's yore old man!" Larry retorted, and walked off.

"Well, there's Shorty Bissell," Harvey continued, pointing out another rider. "He claims he ain't afraid o' no bear. He come back late to the ranch one night and tried to kiss Queenie. Didn't you, Shorty? Better go along with the gent and git inta the pictures."

"You go lap up a gallon of carbolic acid!" Shorty snarled, and followed Larry's example.

"Well," the director laughed, "it looks like it's up to us to do it with what men I've brought along. I see the rest of your riders are gradually vanishing. That old bear must be a holy terror if she can make a bunch of hard-boiled cowboys scared of her."

"Don't crow, mister," Harvey observed, coming to the rescue of his men. "You jest wait a night or two till Queenie pays us another visit, then you'll be able to figger jest what sort of devilment she can hand out."

But the big bear failed to show up that night, and early the next morning the men and dogs were after her. By noon the pack of howling, barking animals had hit her trail and brought her to bay, with her back propped against a large boulder. The dogs yipped and snarled, every now and then darting in for a nip. Some of them paid dearly for their temerity, and that seemed to have the effect of slowing the others up, making them less savage and more careful.

Then the riders came up and closed in. Ropes of stout rawhide sailed through the air and settled over the grizzly's neck, nose and legs. She put up a terrific fight, biting through the ropes or striking down on them with such fury that a horse was jerked almost off its feet. But no sooner had she put one rope out of commission than another took its place. The horses, like the dogs, were trained to their work and kept the ropes taut until Queenie, choked into submission, rolled over on her side.

While the fight was going on, the cameraman kept on grinding out film. A wondering multitude of people in the near future would sit in cool, dark theaters and watch the chase and capture of a noble beast whose only sin had been that it obeyed the laws of nature and had angered men by her savage attempt to get track of the cub that had been stolen from her.

"What you gonna do with her now?" Harvey asked, when they had brought Queenie, bound with ropes

as tightly as a mummy is wrapped with linen, to the Double O. "Shoot her?"

"Well, I guess not," Doran laughed. "She's worth money to us. The Point Defiance Park people at Tacoma want a big grizzly, and there's where this one's going."

"Well, git busy and move her offen this yere ranch," Harvey urged, "'cause I'm jest dead on my pins for the want of a night's sleep. Furthermore, the boys can't sleep on the haystack much longer."

THE big truck, with Queenie on it in a strong crate, backed up to the bear pen in Point Defiance Park. It was a large steel-girt enclosure, with a swimming pool and cool den below and a rockery above that. And, shading it at all times of the day, were giant firs and cedars, majestically standing on the edge of that part of the park that had been left in its natural state. No better setting could have been found for a captive fresh from the mountains and the mountain evergreens.

The visitors to the park came running when they saw the truck with its strange burden, and the park police and keepers had a hard time keeping them back while the unloading took place. But when the gate of the crate was opened and the old grizzly stepped into the prepared cage, people fled in terror. For Queenie, recognizing her hated enemy in numbers, flew at the steel bars, making them twang under the strokes of her huge paws. Enraged at her inability to break them down, she reared to her full, awe-inspiring height and stood there, her teeth grating against the steel, her body quivering as she emitted growl after growl.

Voices became hushed, and women picked up their little ones, running with them to the safety of the pavillion. The keepers stood around with heavy clubs, watching for the least signs of a bar giving away, threatening the bear but not daring to go close enough to strike a blow.

Then a strange change came over the big brute. To her ears came a peculiar purring click and to her nostrils a familiar odor. The great grizzly stopped her growling and became suddenly quiet. Slowly she lowered herself away from the bars and turned in the direction from which the sound and smell had come. In one leap she cleared the small swimming pool, loped ungainly up the steps to the rockery, and then paused at the bars of the next cage.

And there, its tiny nose thrust through the bars, was a cub—her cub.

Old Queenie lunged against the bars and thrust her long arms through them, drawing the tiny cub to her and giving vent to that same peculiar clicking purr. Her tongue flicked out and gave the cub its first wash since it had been taken from her.

"She'll claw that cub to death!" the head-keeper yelled. "We've only had it a coupla days. A feller got tired of it and shipped it to us. Boys, if she kills it we'll all get fired! The superintendent's just crazy over that ball o' fur."

Another keeper jerked him back from the cage, pointing excitedly.

"Look!" he cried. "She ain't gonna harm him! She's gonna adopt it! Well, I never saw anything like that before!"

"Adopt it, me eye!" another keeper spoke up. "That's her own cub. I heard the supe say it come from near the Double O Ranch in Cedar Valley—was took from its mother by a cowboy what sent it to the friend, and the friend give it to the park. And this yere old hellion comes from near the Double O, too. They're mother and cub, as plain as the nose on your face!"

"Well, thank God for that!" the head-keeper sighed with relief. "I was scared to death that old grizzly would keep on tearing around till

she'd wrecked her pen and then killed a bunch of us. Just look at her now! Gentle as a lamb, ain't she? After a while we'll turn 'em in together."

Presently, by ones and twos, the visitors to the park began to drift back to the bear pens, where they stood gazing in awe at the tremendous bulk of the old grizzly and listening to its contented clicking as the cub, on other side of the bars, reached through and playfully slapped its mother on the nose.

With the falling of dusk came lurid streaks of lightning and the distant rumble of thunder. Closer came the storm, driving before it a hurricane of wind. From a whispering breeze, it soon grew to a gale. Overhead the lightning flashed and the thunder rolled with the crash of a thousand cannon. The tall evergreens bent and swayed, and some, whose roots were not bedded firmly in the soil, went down with a thud that shook the earth. Toward morning the breeze died down, the thunderstorm passed, and a little later the sun peeped up over the tops of the firs.

The head-keeper was down at the park early and hastened to the grizzly's pen, anxious to know if all had gone well with her and the cub during the storm. But before he got there, he paused and gave a startled gasp. A giant cedar, rotten to the core, lay across the pens. In its fall it had mashed the steel bars almost flat. And across that cedar, as across a bridge, Queenie and her cub had returned to their native timber, which stretched from the confines of the park to the higher reaches of the Olympics.

HARVEY CARR laid the newspaper down, after having read the article to Larry Boyle, and looked a trifle sheepish.

"Well, what do you know about that, Larry?" he demanded. "Old Queenie and her cub are together ag'in. Boy, the way that newspaper reporter wrote that story up, it doggoned near made me cry! Yes, siree."

Larry didn't say anything for a long time. Harvey watched him, waiting.

"Why don't you say something, Larry?" he asked at last. "Ain't that some story?"

"Yeah—on us," Larry replied. "Me, especially. If I hadn't of started it by swiping her cub, ol' Queenie wouldn't have had to suffer thataway."

"You and me both," Harvey agreed. "And, say, what was it all about, anyway? I mean us picking on ol' Queenie. What's she ever done agin us?"

"Search me, Harvey. She didn't kill no cattle, nor nothing. Jest went about minding her own business."

"D'you suppose, Larry, she'll head back this way?"

"Well, I've heard tell as how they sometimes come back to the old den. But you don't wanna be scared of her coming here no more and scaring us stiff. She's got her cub now."

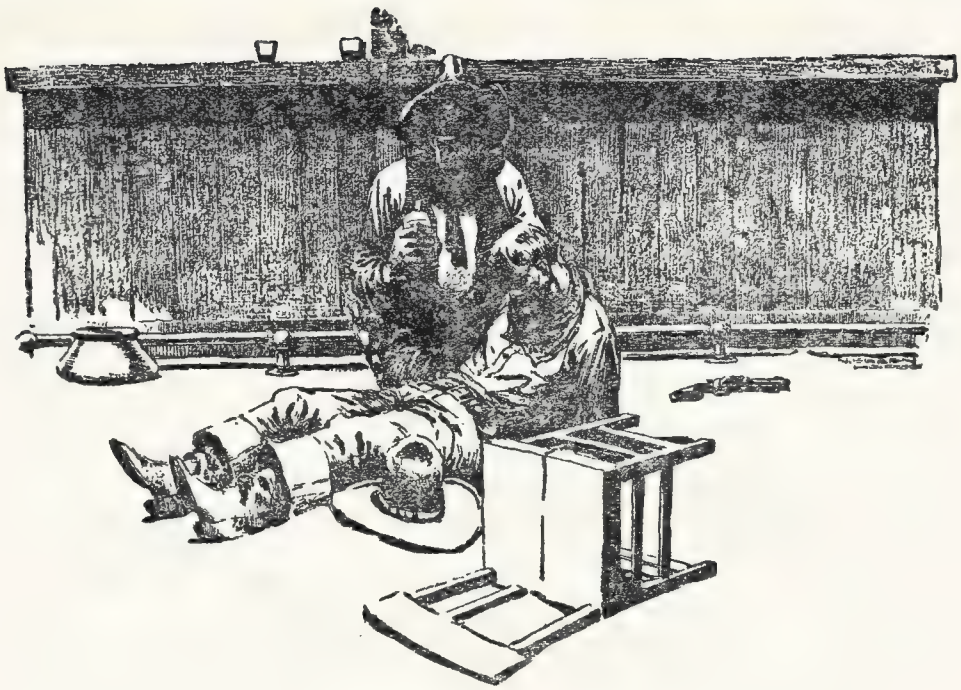
"I ain't thinking o' that, Larry," Harvey said. "What I'm thinking of is, will she be left alone now? Or will some other chump of a rancher take a dislike to her for no good reason at all, like I done, and deal her a lot o' misery?"

"Not while I'm around they won't," Larry affirmed. "I'm ashamed o' what I did."

"So am I, Larry," Harvey admitted. "And listen, you start out right now and tell the boys and everybody you meet to lay offen them grizzlies, or they'll hafta settle with me."

"Okay, boss. And that goes for movie outfits too, don't it?"

"You're darned tooting!" Harvey replied.



A SIX-GUN SHOWDOWN

By Carl Rogers

Quick-fingered, flashy Slim Keene: lightning on the draw and snaky in a pinch. Steady, square-shooting Grindstone Arledge: accurate, fair, and sure-fire. One pitted against the other in a blinding, choking hell of sand and wind. A life—maybe several—in the balance of a moment filled with hot lead hurled from determined six-guns. . . . The showdown!

EMORY ARLEDGE, better known as "Grindstone" to his friends, leaned belligerently over the card table. His big body was rigid and cold all over. The cowboy knew that he was face to face with death.

The grim realization did not make him cringe or back up one inch from his firm stand. On the contrary, the determined light in his gray eyes, and the stubborn set of his square jaws, showed very plainly that he meant to see the game through.

On the opposite side of the table sat Slim Keene, the gambler. In Keene's little pale-green eyes there was a warning glint. The thin face was as cold as a mask of marble.

Keene had just turned a crooked card. For once his nimble fingers had fumbled. The bobble had been ever so slight, but the alert waddy, suspicions already aroused by Keene's steady winning, had caught the crooked deal.

Yes, Grindstone knew that Slim Keene had cheated, and Keene realized that the cowboy knew. He could tell by the look on the puncher's big, bronzed face.

Grindstone realized that if he accused Keene there in the presence of the other two men who were sitting in the game, the gambler would go into blazing action. He likewise realized that Slim Keene was speed personified. The long, slender fingers, rendered supple and kept trained by constant handling of cards, were as

quick as glancing light. There was hardly another man in all the Southwest who could match Slim Keene's gun speed.

As for Grindstone, he was as fast as the average range rider, but no faster. A man of peaceful pursuits of life who had never lived by his gun, he had cultivated accuracy of shooting rather than celerity of draw. No, he was not like Slim Keene, a wizard on the quick draw, but a more deadly accurate shot than Grindstone Arledge had never been seen in the Black Buttes country.

As the cowpoke sat, strong face a little pale, looking into the bleak eyes of the gambler-gunman, he knew that he stood not a shadow of a chance to beat Keene to the draw. He realized, also, that to utter the accusation which was in his mind would be virtual suicide. And yet, utter it he would. The stubborn waddy was not going to let any slick-fingered card cheat hand him a crooked deal and get away with it unchallenged.

Keene's slender right hand was playing indolently with a pearl button on his fancy white vest. Grindstone knew, however, that the tips of those capable fingers were but a few inches from the butt of a pistol which reposed in a shoulder holster. His own big red hands were resting on the table.

Despite the warning stare which Keene was giving him, Grindstone Arledge spoke, and his voice was as harsh as the rasping of a file:

"Push them chips back into the center of the table, fella. I'm callin' for a re-deal, an' this time she'd better be a straight one."

The two other men who sat at the table looked surprised and startled. They gawked first at Grindstone and then at the dealer.

Keene's closely-chiseled mouth tightened. His eyes seemed to send out thin needles of icy light. "What are you getting at, cowpoke?" he questioned in a chilling voice.

"Yuh know danged well what I'm gettin' at!" Grindstone flared. "I'm callin' a new deal 'cause the last one wasn't straight. Yuh took that black ace from the bottom of the deck, Slim Keene."

The man on Grindstone's left sucked in a quick breath and hurriedly deserted the table. The one on his right likewise slithered out of his chair and faded back. . . .

They were alone now—the husky, rock-jawed cowboy and the slender, cold-visaged gambler—facing each other across the card table. For just a few more tense seconds they sat there like stone images, glaring into each others eyes. Then it happened.

With the speed of shooting light, Slim Keene's right hand darted for his hidden gun. Desperately Grindstone went for his own Colt. As he made the play he threw his big body to the left, hoping thereby to get his broad chest out of the way of the gambler-gunman's weapon.

He was not fast enough, for Slim Keene was as quick as lightning. Grindstone's Colt forty-five had no more than cleared leather before Keene's blunt shoulder gun flashed into view and began spitting sizzling lead across the table.

Thrice that gun blazed within a single split second. The three reports sounded almost as one. It seemed to Grindstone that two arrows of flame stabbed right through his barrel chest, that a firebrand raked across the side of his head. His brain gave one cyclonic whirl and then became numb.

He realized dully that his heavy form had jarred to the floor. He felt as if he were spitted there by two red-hot rods of steel. He was breathing hard; his head ached.

Slowly his gaze roved the room. The drinkers and loiterers had deserted the bar. Why was everyone staring at him so stupidly? What had happened? He saw the slender figure of Keene, the gambler, standing behind the card table. A snub-nosed

black Colt was held ready in the man's right hand.

Ah! Now he remembered! Keene had robbed him and then shot him! The dirty skunk!

Grindstone could feel his six-gun still within his grasp. He struggled to raise the weapon, but he could not move a muscle. He felt paralyzed from head to toes. The gun slithered out of his feeble grasp to the floor.

"Get him out of here," Keene clipped off.

A sympathetic bystander went to the assistance of Grindstone. He helped the wounded cowboy to a sitting position and gave him a drink. Then other men came out of their places of safety. The gunfight was over.

The two men who had been at the card table a moment before hurriedly took hold of the wounded cowboy and bore him out of the place. "Gosh, feller!" one of them said in a low tone, as soon as they were out on the street. "You was plumb loco to make a play like that! Shucks, man, it was sooeycide!"

Grindstone did not attempt to reply. He felt tired, very tired. He closed his eyes. It seemed that a sticky, black fog settled over him and that his senses melted into it.

When he awoke he was lying on a physician's operating table. The serious face of Doc Crawford floated above him. The doctor was just putting the finishing touches to a bandage about Grindstone's head.

At that moment the door opened and some one came in. Rolling his eyes aside, Grindstone saw that it was Slim Keene. The gambler was cold, emotionless, as always.

"How about it?" Keene asked, and he nodded toward Grindstone.

The doctor gave him a half-hostile glance, then answered shortly: "He'll pull through all right. He must have leaned away from those shots, for the bullets plowed outward, instead of driving straight into the body."

Keene's thin lips twisted in a heartless smile. "Too bad I didn't drill him center," he remarked callously, in his taut, chilling voice.

He came to Grindstone's side and looked down into the broad face. "Cowboy," he warned, "as soon as you're able to sit a saddle you want to fork your cayuse and unravel a lot of trail between yourself and Black Buttes. Understand? If I ever run into you again, no matter where, there'll be another shooting scrape, and next time you won't need a doctor's care."

Grindstone breathed heavily for a moment, and then in a weak, gasping voice he replied: "Keene, soon as I'm up an' about, I'm a-goin' to tell the world what a card cheat you are. Then me an' you are goin' to have a six-gun showdown. Maybe yuh'll finish me next time, but at least I'll die with the satisfaction of knowin' I put ever'body wise to yore crooked game."

The gambler glared. Well he knew that much talk about crooked cards would seriously hurt, if not completely ruin, his nefarious business at the Golden Eagle. "If you don't leave Black Buttes as soon as you're able to ride," he bit out fiercely, "I'll kill you." Swinging abruptly on his heel, he left the office.

IN back of Doc Crawford's office there was a single large room which the physician utilized as a sort of hospital ward. It was there that Grindstone Arledge stayed while recuperating. The period of his convalescence was short. Strong men and husky cowpokes recover rapidly from wounds.

When he was able to be up and about, Grindstone did not immediately show himself on the street. He did not want Slim Keene to know how near well he was. He meant to be feeling fit when he went out to swap lead with the gambler-gunman. He therefore kept out of sight and got

the doctor, who hated Keene, to put out reports that he was recovering slowly. During the daytime he exercised by pacing the ward. At nights he would steal away from the place and take long rides under cover of darkness.

Grindstone's cronies who came to visit advised him to leave the country. "Yuh know Slim Keene just about rules the roost around here," they reminded him. "Yuh wouldn't have a chance agin him. Nobody would in a gunfight. He's red lightnin' an' sudden death. Life's a lot sweeter than pride, Grindstone, so yuh'd better just swaller the pride, cowboy, an' hit the long trail."

The stubborn cowpoke's reply to all these well-meant entreaties had been that he had lived in the Black Buttes district for twenty-seven years, that he had been there before gold fever had brought human buzzards like Slim Keene flocking into the country, and that he meant to be there long after Keene and others of the gambler's kind were gone.

"Leave my own home stompin' ground just because I caught a snaky gambler in a crooked deal? Like hell I will! I'm staying for the six-gun showdown. An' if you cowpokes were in my boots, you'd do the same thing."

That last statement definitely settled the argument, for not one of those cowboy advisers but knew in his heart that if he were in Grindstone's situation, he would do just as Grindstone was doing.

One day Doctor Crawford, looking a bit worried, came to Grindstone. "Cowboy," he said, "the time has come. Slim Keene knows you're up and around. Someone spied on you and reported to him. Keene stopped me on the street a moment ago. Told me to warn you that he was going to start looking for you at sunset, and that if he found you he would kill you."

Grindstone's heavy jaws tightened. His gray eyes narrowed just a little. For a moment he was silent, then he nodded slowly. "Yeah, I reckon the time has come."

He went to his bed, lifted his belt and gun from the back of a chair, and drew the cartridge-studded strip of leather about his waist.

"You haven't got a chance, cowboy," the doctor blurted anxiously. "Why go out there and get killed? Why not fork your bronc and—"

"Hawgtie that talk," Grindstone cut in harshly. "I ain't runnin' away, an' that's final."

The doctor shrugged. He turned and walked back into his office.

Grindstone went to a rear window. For half an hour he stood there, slouched against the frame, staring moodily out into the open; thinking, thinking, thinking. . . .

Doc had spoken the truth. He did not have a chance. There was not a lead-slinger in all the Southwest who could outdraw Slim Keene. Grindstone felt as if he stood within the somber shadow of death. Nevertheless, his determination was not shaken. He was still resolved that he would play the game to the end.

"I won't turn loose of life until I've got in at least one shot," he promised himself grimly. "An' I'll make that shot count. I ain't got Keene's flashy draw, but I've got accuracy. Yeah, he'll get me all right, but I'll take the polecat along with me as I pass."

A bit sadly, his eyes took in a far sweep of rolling country. He knew every nook and corner of that vast strip of terrain. To the north lay the sand dunes of a semi-desert. To the west, ten miles distant, stood a range of blue hills. Within them, and beyond, was good range—Grindstone's old stamping ground. He loved that country; he loved life. It was tough to have to part with it all. Well, he would go out like a man—but not alone!

Slowly he rolled himself a cigarette.

Three hours! Three hours to live! The thought kept drumming in his brain. Keene had given him until sunset, and in three hours old Sol would be touching the horizon. Three hours to live! . . .

He stuck the cigarette into his slit of a mouth and felt for a match. Suddenly his probing fingers paused. For a full minute he stood as one petrified, gazing steadily toward the north. Slowly a light of discovery dawned in his gray eyes. A hard grin twisted his lips.

"Keene's a lot faster than me," he said to himself, almost in a whisper, "but they ain't no man can shoot straighter than yore ol' Uncle Dudley. Now if I could only get that snake into a situation where accuracy would count for as much as speed! That would give me a real chance!"

The grin widened. He nodded slowly. "Uh-huh; Grindstone Arledge, I'm a-thinkin' me an' you have figured this here thing out!"

GRINDSTONE hurried into the doctor's office. "Doc," he said, "yuh brought a message from Keene. How about takin' one back to the snake from me?"

"Why, certainly," Doctor Crawford readily assented. He gave the cowboy a shrewd glance, evidently wondering if Grindstone had changed his mind about hitting the trail.

"All right, then. Listen, an' get it straight. Go down there to the Gold Eagle an', in a loud voice so's ever'body in the place can hear, tell Keene my gun is in mighty bad shape an' that I aim to spend the next hour or so cleanin' it up. That soon as I'm through an' ready for business, I'll fire three shots as warnin', then I'm leavin' this place an' settin' out to get him. Tell him that if he's got any guts in his system tuh step out through the front door of the Gold Eagle when he hears them shots an' start walkin' up the street to meet me. Got it?"

"Yes, Grindstone, but—"

"Then go ahead an' tell him, an' be shore yuh break the news exactly as I've outlined it."

"But—"

The doctor paused and swallowed his protest. There was a warning glint in Grindstone's gray eyes. The stubborn cow-waddy was mighty tired of having people advise him what to do.

"All right! All right!" the doc hastened to say. "I'll go!"

As he left the office, he added in an undertone, "But you're a fool, Grindstone Arledge! A plain damned fool!"

Ten minutes later he was back. "Well, I told him. The fellow smiled that cold, devilish smile of his and said you'd better figure out who you want to have your pony and outfit after you're gone. There were several men in the place, and they all heard what passed between him and me. I suppose the news is all over town by this time."

"Good!" Grindstone exclaimed. "That's why Keene swallowed my challenge, an' that's why he'll go through with his part of my scheme, just as I've planned it. If he don't, the public might form an opinion he's yeller."

While the battered little alarm clock ticked away the minutes, Grindstone sat near one of the back windows. His big hands were leisurely cleaning and polishing his Colt forty-five. Now and then he raised his head, looked out through the glass, and smiled.

In the front office Doc Crawford, deeply concerned for his young friend, fidgeted and pondered. He was wondering just what scheme Grindstone had in mind, but he did not want to ask further questions. After half an hour had passed, he could no longer stand the strain on his curiosity.

Thrusting himself abruptly through the connecting doorway, he blurted: "Look here, Grindstone, what's all the mystery? What are you up to?"

The cowboy motioned him close and then pointed through the window. "See that sky over there all painted a dirty red?"

"Well, what about it?"

"Doc, I was born an' raised in this here country. I know its every trick an' whim. That red smear means a sandstorm is comin'. I reckon I've seen about a thousand of 'em come whoopin' across the spread of sand waste out there. This one's due to arrive in about another thirty minutes. Just before she hits town I'll fire three shots to warn Keene I'm comin' after 'im. As the first dust-devils go dancin' along the street, I aim to step out through the front door an', slow an' deliberate-like, start towards the Gold Eagle. Savvy the idee?"

The doctor nodded. "I believe I do, Grindstone. You mean you're going to fight Keene while the sandstorm is blowing."

"Uh-huh. With dust-clouds foggin' along the street an' sand blastin' eyes an' faces, I reckon it won't be the quickest draw which counts. We'll both have our irons out when we come in sight of each other, an' with the snap shootin' we'll have to do, accuracy an' gun judgment will count more than anything else."

"By Jacks, cowboy! You've used your head! That scheme will give you an even break!"

The little alarm clock ticked off another twenty minutes. Grindstone was now ready and waiting. He stood beside the back window, watching the long cloud of dust which was approaching from the north, drawing steadily closer and closer. Now it was rolling over the dunes a mile from the Chimney Rocks. Now it had smeared out the streak of trees which marked the course of Antler Creek. Now it was closing in toward the town like a rushing tidal wave. . . .

Doc Crawford came in to report that the street was deserted. Evidently everyone meant to keep indoors until the lead-slinging was over. Of course, everyone would try to watch the battle, but they would do so from windows, doorways, and alleys.

Grindstone took another look through the window. The doctor looked out with him. "Well, it's here," the physician remarked, as he saw a tawny cloud rushing upon the town livery stable.

Grindstone nodded. He hitched up his gunbelt and carefully pulled down his gray Stetson so that it would not be lifted by the wind. He then turned and strode out of the ward, across the office, and onto the sidewalk.

As the cowboy glanced along the street, he saw that Doc Crawford had stated the situation correctly. The town seemed suddenly deserted. Not a man was within sight; not even an animal! Horses had been removed from the danger zone, so as not to be frightened by the sounds of gunfire or struck by stray lead.

The first gust of the storm hit town. It rattled harshly against frame buildings, blew grains of sand dancing and crawling along boardwalks, sent dust swirling and fogging along the street.

Following the first gruff gust of it, there was a lull. During that moment of quiet, Grindstone Arledge drew his Colt forty-five and fired three deliberate shots into the air. Leisurely, then, he proceeded to punch out the smoking shells and replace them with fresh cartridges. All the time his gaze remained riveted upon the Golden Eagle, a hundred and fifty yards away. The front door remained closed. No one appeared on the threshold.

Grindstone was a little surprised. Why had not Slim Keene emerged from his den? Had the gambler-gunman misunderstood or forgotten the plan? Or had the final showdown found him yellow?

"Look out for tricks, cowboy,"

Grindstone heard the voice of Doctor Crawford advising behind him. "That fellow's as cunning as a coyote. Something's wrong. He may be planning to—"

The voice was interrupted. Whether the renewed rush of the storm had drowned it out, or the sudden appearance of Slim Keene on the doorstep of the Golden Eagle had caused the doctor to pause, Grindstone did not know.

Keene was standing there, buttoning his black coat closely about his slender figure. His black hat was pulled low over his brow. He stepped down onto the ground, stood still for a moment, and then started slowly toward Grindstone. The next moment a sweeping, swirling smoke of grit blotched the form from Grindstone's view.

"Well, Doc, here goes," the waddy called to his friend. Stepping from the plank sidewalk, he started down the street to meet Slim Keene. Keene, the superlative quick-draw artist; Keene the treacherous, the cold-blooded killer.

THE dust-fog thickened. It was one of the worst sandstorms Grindstone Arledge ever had seen. The town of Black Buttes, situated at the north base of a great, barren hill, was wholly unprotected from the fierce winds which three or four times each year came booming across the arid stretch of wasteland that lay to the north.

The air was harsh with drifting grit. An awful semigloom had fallen, a gloom that was portentous of disaster and death. The sun rested on the horizon. Like a great rusty disk of bronze, it showed dully through the roiling, boiling dirt-clouds.

Grindstone had taken about thirty or forty steps when, above the snarling of the wind, he heard the bark of a pistol. Something plucked sharply at the collar of his shirt. . . .

The big waddy stopped dead in his tracks. His Colt forty-five leaped from its holster. The shot which he had heard had come from his right front, just as a billow of sand-laden wind had rolled over him. Standing there, crouched in the middle of the street, gun poised, strong jaw outthrust, eyes slitted, he waited for the air to clear.

Grindstone was surprised that Keene had closed in so quickly and that the shot had come from a side of the street, rather than from the middle of it.

"Tricky coyote!" he thought. "Must have advanced at a run an' then ducked aside an' waited for me to show."

With startling abruptness the billow of dust rolled by, leaving the air almost clean for just a few seconds. Grindstone saw a man leaning out from an angle of a store building, peering into the street. At sight of the cowboy, the fellow became confused and fired a hasty shot. The bullet winged within an inch of the waddy's stern face.

Grindstone did not flinch, never moved a muscle. His own shot was deliberate. As it rang out the gunman at the edge of the building gave a sort of despairing cry and slumped. Grindstone ran toward him.

The killer whom the fighting cowboy had dropped proved to be not Slim Keene but one of the fellow's pals, one of two gunmen who usually hung around the gambler, acting as a sort of bodyguard. He had been drilled squarely through the heart.

Grindstone's rugged countenance was harder than ever as he turned back into the street. So that was Keene's game! Realizing that his gun speed would avail him little in a gunfight out there in the storm, the cunning scoundrel, under cover of the blowing grit, had dispatched gunmen to help him kill the cowboy.

Grindstone was like a stalking Nemesis as he moved on. He had no idea of turning back just because he had discovered the odds were heavily

against him. He was more determined than ever to find Slim Keene and shoot it out with the fellow, man to man.

A sudden rift in the storm disclosed a second gunman, crouched between two buildings to his left. The killer had seen him first. Grindstone dropped quickly to one knee, blazing away with his heavy Colt as he did so. A bullet drilled through the crown of his hat, tunneling a swift course through his shock of stiff, sorrel hair.

Jerking himself upright, the big cowpoke started plunging through the tawny haze, making in a zigzag course toward the spot where a sand-billow had blotted out a human form an instant before.

Evidently the gunman had started toward Grindstone at the same instant, for the two men met right at the edge of the boardwalk.

They both stopped. Grindstone was the first, by a split second, to recover his wits. A bullet from his gun sent the man down with a bullet hole just below his right eye. A slug which the gunman fired dug harmlessly into the ground at Grindstone's feet.

"That rubs out the second bodyguard an' clears the way," the cowboy told himself grimly, as he reloaded the empty chambers of his gun. "Now it's me an' Keene, man to man."

THE bronze disk in the west was now halfway below the horizon. The other half rested flatly on the skyline. The eerie gloom had thickened. Buildings and deserted hitch-racks loomed weirdly through the haze. Grindstone stalked on, six-gun held ready, glance flitting here and there in search of Keene.

His first glimpse of the gambler was a fleeting one. A curtain of sand lifted just for an instant and then dropped, but not before it had revealed a skulking form dressed in black.

Doubtless Keene had felt pretty confident that one of his gunmen had downed the cowboy. The sudden sight of the husky waddy striding along the street threw him into a panic. His gun spat viciously, just as the sand-curtain fell. The miss was such a wide one that Grindstone sent a loud, taunting laugh ringing through the windstorm. Another shot cracked out, but the random bullet needled harmlessly through the gritty air.

A long gust of wind rolled over the town. It set up a low, eerie wailing among frame buildings as it swept along. Sand and tiny gravel hissed and scratched as the particles crawled and scoured across hard ground.

A dim black form showed through the darkening, dry fog. It leaped toward a hitch-rack and crouched, partly protected by a cedar post.

Three times within a single second Slim Keene's gun spoke. Its red fire flared dully through the sand-veil. The gambler's six-gun was fairly spewing hot lead, but the shooting was being done from a distance of some twenty-five yards. At that range, and there amidst the haze with grit rasping faces and grating into eyes, speed was not the most important factor of the gunfight.

Keene's first bullet scorched Grindstone's rigid face. Another drew blood from the lobe of his left ear. The third dug between his left arm and his body, searing a hot course across his side.

Grindstone had not let the fierce and rapid gunning rattle him. Deliberately he fired. His ball of lead hurled Keene away from the cedar post.

A bullet laid open the cowboy's right cheek. He gritted his teeth and fired again, aiming for the patch of white vest which showed between the lapels of Keene's black coat. Keene's knees buckled a little, but he quickly jerked his sagging body erect.

The gambler's gun blazed again. The bullet flew wide of its mark.

This time Grindstone had been the first to fire. His slug struck Keene's narrow brow, slapping back the man's head. Keene flung his arms wide, stiffened, and toppled rigidly backward like an overturned statue. . . .

For just a moment the cowboy stood crouched, squinting at the quivering form on the ground. And then the storm threw a dark robe about it, clothing it from his view.

Once more Grindstone reloaded his gun, turned and made directly toward the Golden Eagle. Men stared at him in awe as he entered the dive and slammed the door behind him. Lamps had been lighted. Their dull illumination fell almost weirdly upon the scene, hazed dimly by dust blown under doors and window-sashes.

A red festoon had spread downward from the gash across Grindstone's right cheek. He tried absently to wipe it away with a sleeve of his shirt, but succeeded only in making a gory smear. His red-rimmed eyes, with their dust-laden lashes, took in the room. They fastened upon "Silver" Jack McQuade, cousin of Slim Keene and proprietor of the place in which the gambler had conducted his crooked game. Silver Jack stood behind the bar, hands spread out on the wood, staring like the rest of the men. Grindstone walked straight to him and paused, with only the counter between them.

"Silver," he stated quietly, "Slim Keene an' his two dry-gulchin' gunmen are dead. I reckon what belonged to him now is yores. In that card game me an' him played here just recent, he crooked me out of exactly sixty dollars. I need the dinero to pay Doc Crawford for the repairs he made to me, an' for some more he's goin' to make in a few minutes. Come on; shell out."

"Look here," Silver Jack started in to bluster, "you can't come into my place and hold me up—"

"Shell out," Grindstone repeated in a dispassionate tone, and his right hand moved down to the holstered six-gun at his hip.

Silver Jack weakened. "Why—ah—of course, Grindstone," he hastened to say. "Here it is."

He took three twenty-dollar gold pieces from the till and clapped them on the counter. Grindstone picked them up, then turned and strode toward the door.

No one spoke or moved a muscle as the big cowpoke walked out of the place, turned toward Doc Crawford's office, and disappeared into the dust that was fogging along the street.

His partner needed money, so the young Alaskan sealer sold himself—into a Siberian salt-mine prison hell!

THE KLAXTA MAN

The story of the amazing and thrilling adventures that followed is told by H. H. MATTESON in the next issue.

BLOOD GOLD OF THE YUKON

AN ACTION NOVEL OF THE NORTHWEST

By Howard E. Morgan

A million dollars in gold! Corporal Dan Distenn of the Mounted Police felt it his duty to return the treasure to its rightful owner at any cost. Crow Mord and his gang objected—forcefully. This was a stake worth fighting for; they, too, would risk all to win it. . . .

CHAPTER I

The Passing of a Traitor

MARIO LETRANCH was dying. He knew. So did the rest of Crow Mord's killer-crew. But it didn't matter; life was little respected in the Crow's Nest.

The half-breed eyed the smoking pistol in Crow Mord's hand dispassionately. He coughed, moistened his salty lips with blood-reddened tongue. Mord's first shot had crashed through his chest, missing his heart by the width of a bullet. Close enough; it would soon be over.

"For the last time," Mord snarled, "where was that red coat headed fer?"

Mario LeTranch shrugged, then managed a white-toothed smile. It was laughable! What a fool, that ugly one! If he, Mario LeTranch, had not told where he had guided his good friend, Corporal Dan Distenn, while they were torturing him, while there was life in his strong body, why should they expect him to talk now when his life was as the feeble flutter of a match in the wind? Weakly, he brushed the flies from his sweaty face. His dull eyes swept the semicircle of evil faces, resting on each with a curious intentness. Crow Mord, black-bearded, hook-nosed, mighty of body, with close-set greenish eyes. The talonlike fingers that gripped the big gun seemed almost deformed, they were so long. And that barrel-like chest! Ah *oui*, a mighty man, that Mord. A fitting leader for such a vulture brood.

And there was Joe Indigo, the gigantic negro; the dying man's gaze lingered on the huge gold rings that dangled from the black man's ears. And Big Tim Paradene, the red one! Even at a distance of a rod or more, the sorrel-bearded Irishman befouled the hot air with the odor of whiskey. Tony Torrito's ferret eyes refused to meet the Frenchman's; from time to time the little Italian furtively crossed himself. Mike Malpas sat, block-shaped jaw in horny palm, puffing on his pipe. He spat between two yellow teeth. Slim Garrideb fussed nervously with the scarlet sash about his neck and slapped at the mosquitoes which were already coming up out of the swamp.

Mario LeTranch sighed. A traitor, they had called him. He wondered? True, he had once been a member of this motley crew. And while with them he had done his best to help them locate Mad Yock Hayden and the King Eagle gold. But Dan Distenn had been his friend. Quite a different matter. None of these brutes had ever been friends to Mario LeTranch. He had acted as guide to Dan Distenn. Ah *oui*. But that he should betray that strong one, his friend, to these wolves. . . . That was absurd. And with his last gasping breath, Mario LeTranch did laugh. And when they tossed his dead body over the cliff ten minutes later, he was still smiling a ghastly white-toothed defiance.

IT was stiflingly hot in the Crow's Nest. Joe Indigo, the big East Indian negro, was the only one who was not suffering from the heat. As though in evil compensation, however, the millions of flies and gnats and mosquitoes which drifted up out of the swamp chose the black man in preference to all the others. It hardly seemed possible, this simmering August day, that the flat-topped mountain half a mile above the muskeg-dotted lowlands was within ten miles of the mighty Yukon River and that the Arctic Sea was, as the eagle flies, but two hundred miles distant. The battered thermometer, stuck in a niche in the wall of Crow Mord's cave, registered ninety-two degrees above zero. For two weeks the heat had been intense, the flies and mosquitoes an abomination. Each of the gang, with the exception of Mord himself and the negro, had had touches of malarial fever. Nothing serious; it was the relatively high altitude that saved them. In the mist-hidden lowlands there had been great loss of life, and there were even now many sick men. Not even the oldest sourdough had ever seen a hot spell like this one.

But the heat was soon due to break. The waters of the mighty Yukon were already beginning to rise, indicating that there had been heavy rains farther north. All that morning, while Mord's vulture brood had hovered about the renegade half-breed, black clouds had been filling the sky. It was raining when the shrill cry of alarm arose from Slim Garrideb who, with a pair of powerful binoculars glued to his eyes, had been on watch atop Lookout Rock, high above the camp.

Nobody, not even Crow Mord, questioned Garrideb's excited story. Slim Garrideb had once been a cowpuncher on the green plains of Arizona, and his excellent eyesight made inferior that of any other man in the gang.

"It's him, I tell you," the hard-eyed Yankee cried. "I seen him clear as I see you. Big as any two men, long yaller hair—everything. He was a-plowin' waist deep through the swamp and was totin' a pack half as big as hisself. I could even hear him a-singin'. Hayden, shore enough. I couldn't of been mistook, Crow."

Slim Garrideb was a natural-born liar. So accustomed was he to having everything he said misbelieved that he had formed a habit of protesting against this doubt on the part of his listeners before they even had a chance to question him. This time he might have saved his breath, however;

his description fitted Mad Yock Hayden to a hair!

Crow Mord's greenish, close-set eyes gleamed with savage purpose as he snapped out curt instructions. For upward of ten years Crow Mord had fooled his various employers, deceived his own men, and baffled the police. A shrewd judge of men was this king of the vultures. Only once had any man ever fooled him. That man was Mad Yock Hayden!

It had happened a year ago—this robbery of the King Eagle Mine, one of the boldest thefts ever accomplished in Canadian history. Malarial fever had caused the King Eagle to shut down temporarily. At the time there had been upward of four thousands pounds of virgin gold dust and nuggets all packed in one-hundred-pound containers awaiting shipment. There were half a dozen sick men in camp and four guards—three of these Mounted Police—when Crow Mord swept down out of the hills with his hybrid gang at his back. The four guards had been murdered, the gold loaded on a barge, and within the hour Crow Mord, with a million dollars in his possession, was drifting innocently down the mighty Yukon.

It was queer about Mad Yock Hayden. A giant in stature, with the physical strength of three ordinary men, he apparently possessed the mind of a child. Of course his appearance had a lot to do with this. He had long yellow hair and big vacant blue eyes. He was everlastingly laughing, usually at nothing. He seldom spoke; when he did he never had opinions on anything. He was a willing worker, good-natured, and strong of body. For two years he had served Mord as a sort of human beast of burden.

But there were things going on under Mad Yock Hayden's shock of yellow hair which none but he suspected. That first night the gold-laden barge was moored in a drizzling rain at the head of Yellow Pine Rapids. The barge was pulled well up on the sand. Three men were left to guard it. One of these was Mad Yock Hayden. In the morning the bodies of two dead men were found floating in a backwash at the edge of the stream. The million-dollar barge and Mad Yock Hayden were gone!

And for months thereafter nothing was seen or heard of Mad Yock Hayden. The natural inference was that the simple-minded giant had poled the barge out into the stream, had headed down through Yellow Pine Rapids, and had come to grief. The barge had completely disappeared.

Despite the logic of this, Crow Mord had never been convinced. To him, Mad Yock Hayden was a madman. Crazy men and drunks were hard to kill. He didn't think Hayden was dead. Conversely, he became more and more strongly of the opinion that the giant had in some manner hidden that gold-loaded barge and was hiding out, watching his treasure and waiting his chance to make a getaway with at least some portion of that bulky fortune in raw gold.

And this was exactly what had happened. Mad Yock Hayden *had* run the barge ashore. He had scuttled the unwieldy vessel and, for days, weeks and months, had watched over the spot where the treasure lay.

Less than a month ago Mord had obtained his first definite proof of Hayden's aliveness. Thereafter, he had searched every foot of the adjacent country for miles around, but had discovered no further trace of the madman. That the thief's hide-away could not be far from the Crow's Nest he was sure. So it was that a lookout had been maintained day and night on the rocky pinnacle high above the camp.

To Crow Mord the police were a joke—as a body, that is. Several of them had come snooping around, but only one had ever come close to locating the Crow's Nest. In all the world there was just one man whom

Crow Mord hated and feared. This man was Corporal Dan Distenn, now attached to the Keen Harbor Post of the Royal Northwest Mounted Police. It was Distenn who had ferreted out the approximate location of the Crow's Nest. Disteen was in charge of the King Eagle Mine matter and for several months had been very much on the job. Always in the back of Crow Mord's thoughts there had been the fear that Distenn would locate Mad Yock Hayden and the King Eagle gold before he, Mord, did.

But Slim Garrideb had at last *actually seen* Mad Yock Hayden!

Fifteen minutes after Garrideb had stammered out his story, the entire gang was on its way down into the valley on the trail of Mad Yock Hayden and that one million dollars in gold.

CHAPTER II

The Madman

IN the mouth of an unnamed inlet, brush-hidden from the leisurely moving Yukon fifty yards distant, a man tugged and wrestled with a heavy, water-logged moosehide sack. Wrapped about a strip of rancid, maggoty bacon, inadequately sheltered from the sun by a slime-covered rock, was a sheet from a recent issue of *Scarlet and Gold,* the official house organ of the Mounted Police. On one side of that sheet was the picture of a square-jawed, clear-eyed young man in the uniform of a Corporal of Police. The wide-brimmed hat was tilted at a rakish angle down over one eye. The straight lips promised a ready smile.

It is safe to say that few, even among his best friends, would have recognized the half-clothed, wild-eyed, bearded man who toiled there up to his waist in slimy black mud as that clear-eyed, meticulously-dressed young officer in the picture. But Corporal Dan Distenn had not been near civilization for nearly three months. With the exception of his short association with his old friend, Mario LeTranch, he had, during all this time, lived like a swamp rat among the muskeg. He had been sick for weeks before he had tumbled upon Mad Yock Hayden and the King Eagle Gold. A less virulent will power would have collapsed long ago. Despite the fever, Dan Distenn's body was still strong. It was his mind that had given out. . . .

Corporal Dan Distenn was mad!

He had been sane enough the night he had watched Mad Yock Hayden strip to the skin and dive deep into the white waters of the Yukon. He had seen the double handful of gold glittering in the giant's cupped palms. He would have taken Hayden that night; but his man had started immediately for civilization, there to buy necessary supplies and to enjoy the spree which he had for so many long weary months been picturing in imagination.

Assured that the man would return, Distenn had let Hayden go. The spot where the gold-laden barge rested on the bed of the stream was a veritable graveyard of sunken boats. Following much work under water, Distenn had chosen the best conditioned of those sunken boats and set himself to the task of raising it. This in itself had taken a week. Working in the broiling sun, continually pestered by gnats and flies and mosquitoes, he had patched the barge as it dried out in the sun. Then he had hauled up those heavy sacks from the big scow which Mad Yock Hayden had scuttled and placed them in the barge which he had reconditioned. An apparently simple matter in so many words, but a task which would have broken most men, heart, mind and body.

Dan Distenn paid the penalty for his defiance of nature's immutable laws. That hot morning, while Mario LeTranch lay dying up in the Crow's Nest, madness came. Mumbling to himself, grinning vacantly, Dan Distenn pulled and hauled at the last

of the one-hundred-pound gold pokes. He essayed a song, but only a hoarse croaking sound came out of his dry throat. He buried his face in the muddy water and drank in great gulps. The tepid stuff did not slake his thirst or assuage his raging fever.

It took him the better part of an hour to get that last gold sack into the overloaded boat. But he finally did it, then lay gasping in the terrible heat. His eyes were swollen almost shut, and his face, puffed by thousands of insect bites, was twice its normal size. He returned laboriously to shore and searched through the pockets of his tattered red coat for a cigarette. He had looked through those pockets a hundred times before. There were no cigarettes there; there had not been for a month or more.

Despite the madness, the man's senses were alert. He had lived for so long like an animal in the swamps that this alertness was by now almost second nature. Something was wrong. He didn't know what. A sobbing cry squeezed out through his puffed lips and he dropped on the ground and buried his swollen face in his hands. There was something he had intended doing—something vitally important. What was it?

He came to his feet suddenly in response to an unfamiliar sound. Head on one side, he listened intently. That sound had been a man singing. But, no—he was all balled up. Everything was . . . crazy.

He picked up the long ash pole which he had cut ten days before and balanced it in blistered palms. That pole had something to do with the assignment he was on. He was sure of it. He squinted through his slits of eyes at the gold-filled barge. Subconsciously he noticed that the water was steadily rising. The barge was almost afloat. He brushed a palm over his cheek, and that hand came away smeared with the bloody carcasses of many mosquitoes. Flies clung to his mouth, but he didn't even know it.

He sat down again and looked at the ash pole. His wordless mumblings took on a querulous note. His bloated face became purple in the agony of his mental striving. What was it he had been going to do with that pole?

Corporal Dan Distenn, that madman, did not know when it started to rain. The coolness refreshed him, though. He lay back on a mound of mud while the cool rain pounded his distorted face.

For long he lay there, drenched to the skin in that pelting downpour. His fever was still running high, but the flies and the gnats and the mosquitoes were gone. He slept briefly, but like the wild animals sleep, with every sense alert. He heard Mad Yock Hayden come sloshing through the swamp when the latter was a quarter of a mile distant. He didn't know what to expect; he didn't care. His mental machinery was off balance. When it functioned at all, it operated in mad, erratic cycles. It was purely a physical urge that finally brought him in a single great bound to his feet. He dropped back instantly to hands and knees and crouched, peering this way and that into the mist-hidden swamp. His swollen eyes narrowed with crafty animal cunning. His lips no longer mumbled.

The craftiness of madmen is a much exaggerated tradition. It is nevertheless true that those deprived of sanity are compensated in many ways. A madman, his body no longer under complete control of his mind, is possessed of great strength. "With the strength of a madman" is a familiar saying. A distorted mind dictates certain physical actions, but that mind does not think as a sane mind thinks. Neither does the body act like a well-governed, healthy body.

So it was that, although Dan Distenn did not see Mad Yock Hayden, he acted, and in a way that no normal man would have acted. He headed straight into the swamp and within the first fifty feet was plowing shoul-

der-deep through liquid ooze. Twice he stepped into holes and his head disappeared beneath that black mess. But he kept going and came out, finally, one hundred yards or so behind Hayden as the yellow-haired giant splashed on toward the spot where his treasure lay, as he thought, buried ten feet beneath the yellow-white surface of the Yukon.

On the shore of the little inlet, Hayden stopped and peered about suspiciously. Distenn sprawled face forward in the mud, only a side of his whiskered face showing. There was no hint of madness in the blond giant's pale blue eyes as he parted the brush and stepped cautiously out into the open. It was raining hard now. The nearby shore of the Yukon was all but hidden in a misty blur. Hayden made out the vague outlines of the strange barge. A hoarse cry rumbled in his throat. He started forward, but stopped suddenly. Very carefully he removed the heavy pack from his back, unlimbered his rifle, and dropped on his knee behind an alder clump. . . .

For perhaps one hundred seconds the giant crouched there, absolutely motionless. With his body covered with slimy mud from head to foot, only the keenest of eyes could have distinguished his stooped body from any one of the many gnarled stumps which littered the swamp.

In the black-shadowed swamp behind the watching man, Dan Distenn inched his way forward, flat upon his stomach in the sticky mud. Twice Mad Yock Hayden looked back quickly over his shoulder. But each time his suspicious eyes missed that slime-covered crawling thing.

Distenn was within thirty feet of the giant when the latter slipped away. Moving with astonishing speed for such a big man, he crept, bent almost double, along the reed-grown shore of the inlet toward the river. Distenn was close behind when the giant came out upon the trampled border of that little open space where Distenn's crude tackle, with which he had raised the sunken barge, was still in place. A single bound carried Hayden across that rain-washed open space to the side of the heavily-loaded scow. He caught the edge of the boat with his long arm and, using hands and feet like a huge gorilla, clambered aboard. Just for an instant did the giant's stooped body drop down out of sight as he inspected the precious contents of the rocking boat. Within that instant Dan Distenn slipped across the open and into the muddy waters of the Yukon. He came up under the scow, felt his way along the bottom, and slid up along the near side of the boat just as Mad Yock Hayden, muttering under his breath, sprang out upon the shore.

Mad Yock Hayden never had been mad; neither was he as simple-minded as his appearance might indicate. It was Corporal Dan Distenn who was the madman, therefore it was Distenn who acted like the madman. Even so, there was a hint of logic in his actions. The erratic channels of his disordered mind carried the positive assurance that Mad Yock Hayden was an enemy and, as such, should be destroyed. Here was a suggestion of sanity at any rate. It was the maniac in him which caused the mountie to spring to his feet, long arms thrust skyward. God alone knows what mad fancy caused him to let out a shrieking yell which awoke muffled echoes that refused to be smothered by the blanketing rain.

Mad Yock Hayden jumped a foot in the air as though a cannon had been shot off behind him. He pivoted clumsily on his heels and stared open mouthed at the terrible apparition that faced him. Although he knew Corporal Dan Distenn well, not for a moment did he suspect that the ragged, mud-covered, bloated scarecrow responsible for that caterwauling cry was that same debonair, ruggedly handsome, young police officer.

In one respect only was Mad Yock Hayden's rapid diagnosis correct: the man who faced him *was* crazy! The heat and the insects had gotten him, of course. But, crazy or no, *there* was that pertinacious one who had raised *his* gold from the bottom of the river.

CHAPTER III

The Cloudburst

MAD YOCK HAYDEN was rated as a big man, even in this wilderness land where big men were the rule rather than the exception. Even so, Dan Distenn, despite the ravages of sickness, was as tall and nearly as broad. Hayden measured the half-naked figure in a single appraising glance. Then, like a flash, he shifted his grip to the butt of his rifle and swung the heavy gun over his head. Distenn's body was anchored to the thighs in swift-running water. He attempted to spring upon the giant, but the clinging water held him back. He floundered on a side, half in the water, half on the gravelly shore. The down-swinging rifle missed his head by inches. Within the next instant his blistered hands caught Mad Yock Hayden by the ankles. A surging pull and the giant toppled, struggling, to the ground.

With that hard-muscled resiliency peculiar to all mad things, Distenn literally bounced into the air and down upon his writhing opponent. The rifle clattered from the giant's hand as he reached for the corded neck above him. He found a hold, but his big fingers slid off the policeman's wet hide. A bone-hard fist crashed into his face. A hoarse animal-like sound breathed out through the fever-cracked lips close to his ear. The thick-muscled body on top of him was as hard as tempered steel. A shudder of dread twitched through the giant's big body. Here was no creature of flesh and blood! This—thing—was mad, an insensate maniac possessed of the strength of a dozen men!

Just for a second the fight went out of Mad Yock Hayden. He spat broken teeth and attempted to roll free. If he could have gotten away, he would have run. He was on hands and knees when strong hands caught him and lifted him bodily. He screamed when he felt himself hurtling through the air. Just as his head and shoulders landed in the sticky ooze on the edge of the stream, a burst of mad laughter sounded. Hayden's head and one shoulder sank deep in the soft mud. Gasping for breath, he floundered to the water's edge on his back. Through the muddy film that obscured his vision, he saw the madman spring toward him. Instinctively he kicked outward and upward with both feet. His heavy boot heels struck the madman in the chest with a hollow pounding sound, hurling him a dozen feet away into the bushes.

The giant scrambled hastily to his feet. His wet fingers reached for the knife in his belt. He was on his knee, knife gleaming in upraised hand, when a heavy weight came down upon his shoulders. It was the madman, of course, but he had not even seen the devil come out of those bushes! An iron-hard arm locked about his throat and tightened there, pulling him backward. He struck blindly with the knife. A hand caught his knife arm, twisting it backward sharply.

Mad Yock Hayden knew that he was battling for his very life, and for the first time he was fighting with a man stronger than himself. There was death in that throttling grip about his throat. His right arm was being broken. . . . He dropped the knife and put forth every ounce of his tremendous strength in an effort to break that choking hold about his throat. With a mighty heave, he lifted Distenn bodily. But the man clung like a leech. Both were on their feet for an instant, then they were again on the ground, writhing and floundering in the mud like two prehistoric

monsters engaged in a battle to the death. The giant's face was purple. The breath came in short wheezing gasps through his restricted throat. One last violent attempt he made. Bracing his feet against the slippery bank, he pushed backward with all his strength. There was a liquid plop and the two struggling bodies disappeared beneath the surface of the muddy water of the little inlet.

Mad Yock Hayden was an excellent swimmer. Given an even chance, he would have worked free from that death hold by the simple expedient of holding his opponent under water. But under the circumstances, his qualifications as a swimmer availed him little. There had been no breath in his lungs when he went under. Distenn, on the other hand, had been prepared. And it was Distenn who held the struggling giant down on the slimy bottom of the stream.

Muddy bubbles rippled to the top of the water and skittered along its surface. The rain, descending now in torrents, made little mushroom-shaped cups as the big drops hit the stream. Dan Distenn came to the surface and breathed deeply. There was no sign of Mad Yock Hayden.

Distenn stooped and picked up Hayden's rifle. For a moment then he stood rigidly alert, his swollen face pointing toward the north. There was a distant rumbling roar. Even in his mad fancy he likened it to the breaking up of the ice in the spring. The sound seemed to be drawing nearer. The sky was black, and there were sharp crackling sounds overhead. . . . Not thunder. His body tingled from head to foot as though an electric current had shot through him. A gust of wind-driven rain struck him and made him stagger. The Yukon was rising noticeably, inching its way up along the muddy banks of the little inlet. The gold-laden scow was rocking dangerously. At this rate, the boat would very soon be afloat.

Dan Distenn was not particularly concerned about this. For some unknown reason, his disordered thoughts failed to connect up that heavy scow with . . . anything. If it had been a canoe, he might have looked upon that familiar means of transportation with understanding. But that flat-bottomed barge, heavy, unwieldy, lazily rocking there in the water, meant nothing to him. It was the rain that interested him most. Certainly this was like no other rain he had ever seen. The water seemed to fall in sheets out of the sky. It was as though millions of huge buckets had been overturned all at once and their contents dumped upon the sweltering earth. It was a cloudburst. But Dan Distenn did not know this. He merely knew that he liked it. The water was cold, and it made him feel good. He threw out his chest and cried aloud.

The long ash pole washed up at his feet. Automatically he stooped to retrieve that symbol of some forgotten plan. As he crouched there, he glimpsed a face peering out at him through the liquid curtain of rain on the opposite side of the inlet. That face was coal black. White teeth gleamed briefly in a satisfied smile; then, a gun twitched upward in the negro's hand.

Dan Distenn acted instinctively. Still bent forward in a half crouch, he swung the rifle over his head and hurled it with all his might at that black face. The negro's gun roared. Something twitched sharply at Distenn's left shoulder. Then Joe Indigo crashed back into the swamp as that hurtling gun struck him in the chest.

There was a stifled yell, and Dan Distenn sprang to his feet. Gripping the long ash pole in both hands, he peered warily about. He was no longer mumbling. The purple flush had left his face. Only that muffled drumming inside his head persisted, and his racing thoughts were still without beginning or end. When he glimpsed Crow Mord's rain-washed face, however, he automatically mumbled the

man's name, and his gripping hands tightened on the long ash pole. He searched the rain-spattered ground for his rifle. The gun was nowhere in sight. When he again looked up, he saw and recognized Mike Malpas and Big Tim Paradene. The negro had disappeared, but Mord and Paradene were advancing, rifles in hands. Mike Malpas was circling about on the opposite side of the stream.

Dan Distenn hesitated briefly, then stepped backward and slid down the muddy bank and into the water. For some twenty feet he swam under water, still clutching the long ash pole. The swift current of the Yukon caught him at the mouth of the little inlet before he came to the surface, and he would have been swept away had not the pole locked crosswise, one end against the gold-laden barge and the other against a rock on the shore. As his head popped above the water, a rifle bullet ripped past his face. Rain-drenched muddy figures slipped and slid along the shore, squinting through the opaque wall of driving rain for sight of him. They couldn't see him. That first shot had been merely a lucky accident. Other bullets crashed into the barge, but none hit close.

First and foremost in Dan Distenn's crazy thoughts was the desire to come to grips with those men. The rain-blurred faces of all were familiar. He didn't like them, and they were trying to hurt him. But somewhere, riding close to the surface in his mental hodge-podge, was an animal-like cunning. He would fool those men, slip downstream, then steal ashore and come up behind them. The rifles they carried were familiar; he wished that he had one. But that long ash pole would do. He took a long breath and circled the barge under water. He came up on the far side of the rocking scow and reached for the bottom of the stream with his feet. Shaking the wet hair out of his eyes, he came to the surface again. To his amazement the rocking bulk of the scow no longer shielded him from the men on shore.

The gold-laden barge was drifting downstream! A bullet clipped the back of his neck as he struck out strongly in instinctive pursuit of the fugitive scow. Other shots traced his course. He could see the men running along the shore, heard their frantic shouts.

The boat had already been carried by a swift undercurrent some distance from shore when the mad swimmer reached it. He pulled himself aboard and dropped down upon the water-logged gold pokes. In his pursuit of the runaway scow, he had relinquished the ash pole. As he leaned precariously over the side looking for it, a bullet struck the rust-eaten metal gunwale and richocheted away, passing so close to his forehead in its spinning course that he was for the moment half blinded and dazed. The ash pole shot by. He grabbed blindly for it, lost balance, and sprawled headlong into the water.

The boat swung halfway around in a swift eddy. Distenn found himself clinging to the prow as the heavy barge finally straightened out and careened downstream. Clinging tightly, head just above water, the rest of his body stretched out full length along the bottom of the boat, he fought against the blinding numbness caused by that spent bullet. The cold water partially revived him. His eyes cleared.

The first thing his restored vision showed him was a naked man running along the muddy shore paralleling the scow. The man was Big Tim Paradene who, incidentally, was like a fish in the water. Between his teeth the Irishman carried a long, thin-bladed knife. Even as Distenn watched, wondering, Paradene dove into the stream and struck out for the barge.

Crow Mord, slipping and sliding along the muddy bank, watched the swimmer's progress with frantic con-

cern. It was a dangerous task he had set for that fighting fool, Tim Paradene. He had not seen Distenn flop overboard. Insofar as he knew, therefore, the policeman was aboard that scow. Paradene was a fierce and willing fighter and as strong as an ox. He might win out. Anyhow, it was their only chance. A mile below was Wild Horse Rapids, the longest and most dangerous stretch of rough water on the upper Yukon. That that barge contained the King Pin gold, Mord was sure; he had glimpsed those familiar moosehide sacks heaped indiscriminately on the floor of the scow. One million dollars! Human life weighed lightly in the balance against such a prize. . . .

That the man on that scow was Dan Distenn, an officer in the ranks of the Royal Northwest Mounted Police, concerned Crow Mord not at all. The fact that Big Tim Paradene was his first lieutenant and his only trusted friend was a small matter compared with the tremendous stake involved. That barge simply had to be stopped before it reached the entrance of Wild Horse Rapids. If not, that million dollars in gold would disappear exactly as it had done before, when, under the unskillful guidance of Mad Yock Hayden, it had been sunk in that graveyard of boats where Distenn had found it. Night was already coming on. In the darkness and the blinding storm it would be impossible to follow the course of the unwieldy scow down through the rapids. It would come to grief somewhere, surely, and it would be like looking for a grain of silver in a snowbank to locate the sunken gold in those mad whirlpools and underground channels of Wild Horse Rapids. When last seen, Distenn had been carrying a long ash pole. With that pole Paradene should be able to keep the scow from the swift, deep channel in midriver and, little by little, urge it into shallow water.

Just before he reached the scow, Paradene dove, swam deeply, and came up alongside the boat. Pawing the wet hair out of his eyes with one hand, he gripped the knife in the other. A second before, Distenn had slipped around the bottom of the barge out of sight. The big Irishman gripped the side of the boat and, knife in free hand, pulled himself up. Despite the darkness, a single glance assured him that there was no human being in that scow. He saw the gold, and his greenish eyes gleamed with avarice. He shivered as the cold rain pelted his bare body. Just at that moment Big Tim Paradene would have parted with a goodly portion of his share of that gold for a stiff drink of whiskey. Still shivering, he searched about in the dimness for the ash pole. He slipped on one of the gold-filled sacks, fell heavily, and got up swearing. There was no sign of the pole. The entrance to Wild Horse Rapids could not be far away now. A sudden fear gripped him. If he should be carried down through the rapids with that barge it would mean an end to Big Tim Paradene. Without a pole—or something—he would never be able to change the course of the clumsy scow. . . .

But fortune favored Tim Paradene for the moment. The boat nosed into a swirling eddy and, with a swift-lurching motion that threw him heavily against the boat's side, swung two-thirds about and headed diagonally toward the near shore and the anxiously-watching Crow Mord. Big Tim was scarcely prepared for this lucky break. He bellowed to attract attention and was busy trying to figure out some way of himself getting credit for the fortuitous circumstance when a heavy weight landed on his back.

CHAPTER IV

Jaws of Death

A STURDY specimen was Big Tim Paradene, and he would rather fight than eat. If he had made quick

use of his knife, that particular fight might have been decided in his favor within the first thirty seconds. But Tim Paradene was a fist-fighter. Any other method of offense or defense met with his sneering contempt. So it was that, instead of slashing at the clinging weight upon his back, he swung about and struck with his fist at the whiskered face that rested on his shoulder. His bony knuckles hit the top of Dan Distenn's head. There was amazing force behind the short armed blow. Distenn's grip—none too secure about the big Irishman's rain-wet body—slipped, and he fell back among the gold-filled pokes. Paradene turned like a flash. Quickly as he moved, however, he was a full second slower than that steel-muscled madman. He had scarcely focused his green eyes on the crouching figure of his enemy when both feet were yanked from under him. Even as he fell he instinctively struck out with the knife. He felt the blade slide greasily along the half-dressed policeman's back, then a rigid knee drove into the pit of his stomach. . . .

Too much rotgut whiskey had made Tim Paradene's stomach his weakest spot. That boring knee knocked the fighting tenseness out of him for an instant. Strong fingers locked about his right wrist. That right arm was brought down against the metal gunwale of the boat. It was a marvel that the bone did not snap; as it was, the knife slipped from his fingers. The pain roused his fighting Irish blood and he struck out savagely, butting at the whiskered face above him with his head.

Very suddenly, then, Big Tim Paradene found himself on his feet. He didn't know how he got there. Afterward he realized that he had been lifted bodily, as though his two-hundred-pound bulk were a small sack of beans. He struck out blindly right and left in quick succession. Both fists slid harmlessly off the madman's wet shoulders.

The scow had drifted with the circular-sweeping current to within a dozen feet of the shore. Abruptly then, it had swung back toward mid-channel, following that same erratic current of deep-running water. Just as the boat swept away from the shore, long fingers caught the Irishman about the right leg just above the knee. Other fingers seized him by the throat. Arms and legs wildly flailing, he was lifted high in the air.

No normal man could have done what Dan Distenn did to Big Tom Paradene. But Corporal Dan Distenn was not normal; he was a madman, and in his tense-muscled body there was the fleeting strength of three strong men. High above his head he swung Big Tim Paradene's two-hundred-pound body. Then, with a mad yell, he hurled the living weight through the air.

Tim Paradene landed flat upon his naked back on the slippery gravel along the shore of the stream. Crow Mord and Tony Torrito came running up, but neither paid the dazed Irishman the slightest attention. Directly below was the foam-hidden maw of Wild Horse Rapids. The gold-laden scow, with its mad passenger, had gyrated out into midstream and was now headed straight for those roaring rapids!

Wild Horse Rapids dropped several hundred feet within the first fraction of a mile on its four-mile course. In gentler season, canoes manned by skilled performers with ash paddles were able successfully to negotiate its mad runs and rock-infested whirlpools. Even so, one succeeded where a dozen failed—this with lightweight, easily-handled canoes. No heavily-loaded boats were ever taken down through Wild Horse Rapids by those who knew what those rapids were like.

Superficially, it seemed impossible for that ungainly barge, heavily loaded as it was, to get through. Of course the stream was flood high. Even

at the time of spring freshets, there was seldom as much water racing seaward in that mighty watershed as there was just at this time. Most of the usual channels had been blotted out by the roaring, tumbling mass of rain water. Many of the most treacherous whirlpools had been swamped and obliterated by this youthful flood which had dropped out of the heavens in one monstrous liquid mass.

Along both sides of Wild Horse Rapids sheer walls of rock stretched upward, in places a quarter of a mile in height. The irregularity of these walls rendered it impossible for any man to follow along shore. Crow Mord knew this, but even after the gold-laden scow had disappeared in that mountain-high cloud of spray which was the beginning of the rapids, he slipped and slid onward and upward over the wet rocks, straining to catch a glimpse of the precious freight.

If he could only discover, just approximately, where the wreck took place, he would at least have something to start on in his search for the lost gold.

To the madman aboard that million-dollar scow, that first wild plunge downward into the mist-hidden abyss generated nothing more than a certain nerve-tingling exhilaration. He shouted and waved clenched fists at the rocky walls. Here was another fight, something to struggle against. But he didn't know what to do. A huge wave swept up over the prow and sent him sprawling. A whirlpool caught the boat and swung it twice around with bewildering speed. The man hung on grimly to several of the little sacks on the floor of the boat. Considerable water had been shipped. He attempted to bale it out with cupped palms. This failing, he emptied one of the sacks and used the leather poke as a pail. But it was slow work, and he was too excited to be interested in such a monotonous occupation.

The little pyramid of gold dust and nuggets that he had dumped from the bag attracted him strongly. He ran the heavy stuff through his fingers and scowled perplexedly. That yellow stuff was gold; he knew that. He had been looking for gold—and men. More particularly, men. Crow Mord—yes—and others. He could not remember their names.

Six years as a hunter of men had left an indelible impression on Dan Distenn. Even in his madness, the urge was there to seek out Crow Mord and those others. Throughout that mad journey this urge became almost an obsession with him. Like an animal cooped up in a moving train, he circled around and around the barge, his eyes on the rain-blurred walls looking for a way out of the trap in which he unexpectedly found himself. Although his reasoning powers were nil, he knew that it would be best not to attempt to leave the rapidly-moving boat.

Darkness, hastened by the storm and the encroaching walls, settled upon the man and the crazily-rocking boat like a wet, black blanket. Dan Distenn was not afraid. That heart-throbbing exhilaration persisted, tempered by a yearning to get ashore and search out his enemies. Within a quarter of a mile of the mouth of the rapids, the scow was pulled aside into a gigantic whirlpool. The water here was fifty feet deep. The pool itself was bottomless, its swirling waters sucking underground through a narrow channel to erupt miles beyond in the heart of a muskeg swamp. All other flood-carried objects, even to great trees yanked up by the roots, were drawn down into that liquid vortex and swept away into that underground river. But the gold-laden scow was too bulky and too heavy. Around and around and around it spun, the sucking eddies like slimy tentacles of a huge octopus clutching at its slippery sides as though reluctant to relinquish such a valuable prize.

For hours the scow circled that big whirlpool. But Dan Distenn did not know. Lulled by the persistent rotating motion of the boat, he lay stretched out full length on the floor, soundly sleeping. . . .

The level of the water receded as rapidly as it had risen. It was this lower water, accompanied by a weakening in the sucking pull of the whirlpool, that finally freed the barge.

IT was dawn when Dan Distenn awoke. His first conscious impression was of great hunger. This sensation was a new one. While his fever had raged, he had eaten little. Not once had he been hungry. He searched the barge thoroughly but found no food.

The boat was drifting slowly on the broad bosom of the mighty river, several miles below Wild Horse Rapids. A heavy mist hung low upon the water, hiding all objects thirty feet or more away from sight. A cool breeze was blowing the fog upstream. This made it seem as though the barge were traveling at express train speed.

The level of the river was now only a few feet above normal. Ahead there was a short rapids known as Miracle Shoals. These rapids were not dangerous. In the high water of the night before the gold barge could have ridden them easily. The heavy scow acutally did ride the one and only passable channel down through Miracle Shoals. At the very end of the rapids, however, a sharp-edged rock tore deep into its water-rotted side. The scow almost instantly began to list as it shipped muddy water in a spouting stream.

Dan Distenn watched the incoming water with unexcited eyes. He didn't know what it meant, nor did he care. In the first place, he was hungry. In the second place, he wanted to go find those men.

Tipping lopsidedly, the scow nosed toward shore. The instant the wooded bank appeared through the fog, Distenn leaped into the water and swam ashore.

He did not even turn for one last backward look at the rapidly-sinking boat. He was half a mile away when that million dollars worth of King Eagle gold for the second time found a resting place on that repository of so many secrets, the bottom of the mighty Yukon.

CHAPTER V

The Cornered Pack

ALMOST immediately, Distenn found himself on familiar ground. He did not know where he was, however, for he could not connect things up. He followed familiar landmarks blindly, heading always toward the north. When he was faced by the sheer mountain wall through which Wild Horse Rapids cut its way, he sought and finally found a twisting trail that circled in and out among the rocks, but pointed northward.

The sun was just squeezing through the walls of valley mist when he caught the odor of wood smoke. A couple of minutes later he heard a man swearing. His puffed lips grimaced a smile at the familiar sounds. Mike Malpas was experiencing difficulty in building a fire; he had been obliged to hack a whole dead tree to pieces to find enough dry wood. But he had finally accomplished what he set out to do, and when Dan Distenn appeared he was broiling strips of bacon on a greenwood spit over the flames.

The blood of many races ran through Mike Malpas' phlegmatic body. Two years before he and Joe Indigo, the negro, had murdered the starving crew of a whaler frozen in the ice of the Arctic Sea. Taking all the available grub and such valuables as they could lay their hands on, they had fled southward, finally joining forces with Crow Mord's cutthroat gang. Mike Malpas was a sailor and

no woodsman, which accounts for his failure to either hear or see Dan Distenn until the latter was almost on top of him.

Distenn recognized that square head and the fishlike blue eyes, but he could not fit a name to the owner of those familiar features. The man was an enemy, though. Of this he was sure. He was, therefore, not in the least surprised when Malpas grunted and sprang toward his rifle where it lay braced against the rocks a dozen feet from the smoldering fire. Distenn made a flying leap, kicking out in midair with both feet, after the fashion of the French lumberjacks. His flying attack intercepted Malpas halfway between the fire and the rifle. His outthrust feet hit the man in the ribs, sending him crashing among the rocks at the edge of the little gully.

The sailor's square head smacked against a boulder with force sufficient to have crushed the skull of an ordinary man. But Mike Malpas' head was hard and his angular body tough. He scrambled hastily to his feet, and, as Distenn started toward him, he caught up a jagged rock and hurled it with all his might. The stone brushed a side of the madman's head. An animal-like growl blurted up through Distenn's swollen lips, and, long fingers hooked like claws, he rushed his enemy.

Even now Mike Malpas did not fight like other men. He dropped back among the rocks as Distenn threw himself forward and, instead of striking with his fist, kicked out savagely. The heel of his hob-nailed boot missed Distenn's groin as the latter turned quickly aside. Even in his madness Dan Distenn knew contempt for such dirty tactics. In a breath he became a raging fury. His hard fist drove into the sailor's face.

In his youth, when sailing before the mast, Mike Malpas had been manhandled by experts. Of late years he had nourished his hateful nature by brutally beating those weaker ones who sailed under *him* in his capacity as mate of various ships. With the years he had developed in brawn if not in brains. It was his proud boast that he had never been knocked out. But his hard head was no match for Dan Distenn's pistonlike fists. In that first rapid flurry of pounding blows he was beaten to the ground. A long arm jerked him upright. And, strangely enough, it was a smashing blow squarely between the eyes that sent him into dreamland.

Dan Distenn looked down at Mike Malpas' sprawling body speculatively. The man had gone to sleep; he wasn't dead. He wondered vaguely what he should do. He fumbled automatically through his pockets looking for a pair of handcuffs. There were none there. He peered down over the edge of the cliff to the rocks a hundred feet below. Here was a sure way of disposing of that enemy. But even in his madness he could not bring himself to kill just for the sake of killing. After all, the man was asleep, and he, Dan Distenn, was very hungry.

He ate voraciously of half-cooked bacon and canned beans. He was still eating when the sound of voices came to him. He was not greatly perturbed. Those voices might emanate from near at hand, then again, they might be some distance away. Sounds carry far in the clear, still air of the north. And the air had cleared. The valley mists had lifted and vanished mysteriously. The sky was blue and coolly clear, reminiscent of the northland's short autumn now near at hand that spans so briefly the hot summer and the Arctic winter.

It was the sound of loose stones rattling under uncautious boot heels that finally brought him to his feet.

He did not at once place the sounds, but he knew that they had come from above. With the speed and agility of a mountain goat, he made his way up the rocky hillside. In his right hand

he gripped a three-foot stick as large around as his arm. The stick was water-soaked and heavy; small wonder Mike Malpas had not been able to start his fire with it.

Distenn reached the top of the rocky wall without having discovered sign of any living thing. He approached the edge of the precipice before him cautiously; peered over and down. Directly below, at the bottom of the long, sheer drop, was the beginning of Wild Horse Rapids.

Almost at the same instant he saw the big Indian canoe—and Mord's men. It was the latter's voices he had heard. They were all there, except Malpas: Big Tim Paradene, limping slightly, Joe Indigo, Slim Garrideb and Tony Torrito. All except Mord seemed disturbed by sight of that canoe.

The reason for their alarm was clear even to Dan Distenn's confused thoughts. The scene there before him presented a situation with which he was as familiar as with the features of his own face. There were two red-coated figures in that big Indian war canoe. The man in the prow held a pair of fieldglasses to his eyes. The big man in the stern was swinging slowly into shore in response to his companion's instructions.

Dan Distenn did not see the girl until the canoe turned broadside toward him. Then he cried out involuntarily—a sort of hoarse, whimpering cry which might have meant almost anything coming from a madman. In Dan Distenn's case, however, it meant just one thing. The girl seated there among many blankets in the center of that canoe was Erlla Kane, and to Dan Distenn, *the* woman. Erlla Kane was a nurse. At the time of the scarlet fever epidemic the previous spring she had been one of three nurses sent on from the East to Keen Harbor, there to lend a hand with the hundreds of helpless Indians, who, when stricken down by the pestilence, chose to seek help from the white man rather than from their own medicine men. The sight of the girl he loved, and the realization of her great danger, brought Dan Distenn nearer to sanity than he had been at any time for many days. So concentrated was his gaze upon that cloaked feminine figure that he did not notice the small empty canoe trailing by a rope twenty feet behind the big one.

The man with the field glasses had evidently spotted some one or all of Mord's gang. The canoe was most certainly heading toward shore.

Dan Distenn was frantic. Like a dog which senses some great danger but cannot make its master understand, so Dan Distenn's erratic thoughts puzzled over the problem that faced *him*. He could see that which the men down there in the boat could not see. Crow Mord and his men were cornered! They had already dropped behind sheltering boulders, with the sheer wall of the precipice at their backs. They could go no further. If the two policemen came ashore and started up that rock-littered slope, there would be a fight with not one chance in a thousand of the redcoats emerging victorious. As soon as they got within rifle range, the policemen would of necessity be obliged to cross a wide strip of open sand. Here they would be absolutely at the mercy of the men up there among the rocks.

All of this was so familiar to Dan Distenn that he understood perfectly what was expected of him. He should warn those red-coated men, his comrades. But how? At that spot where he stood the rocky wall dropped absolutely perpendicularly to that sand-pit below. Farther upstream, approximately opposite the spot where the canoe would beach, the rocky wall was not quite so steep. Even so, no man in his right senses would have thought of attempting to descend that slippery wall.

But Dan Distenn was not in his right senses. His movements reflected a cunningness, however, which no sane

man could have duplicated. Running like a deer, he sped along the lip of the precipice. Mord's men could not see him. The men in the boat could have seen him if they had been looking that way but their eyes were fixed on that jumble of rocks up on the hillside where Gregory Cavendish had last seen Joe Indigo's black face.

SERGEANT SCOTTY MACROBERTS of Keen Harbor Post, accompanied by Greg Cavendish, latest recruit in the active service of the Mounted, had started out five days ago in search of Corporal Dan Distenn. They had found Mad Yock Hayden's body, Dan Distenn's coat, and other odds and ends early that morning. They would have camped there at the mouth of the little inlet, and pursued their investigations from that point, had it not been for Erlla Kane's presence. They had picked her up two days before at an isolated Indian camp where she had been located for the past month, and they felt in duty bound to take her back to Keen Harbor with them.

Sergeant Scotty MacRoberts and Gregory Cavendish were a queerly assorted pair. In the World War Cavendish had been captain of a Glasgow company of Scots. Scotty MacRoberts had served under him as top-sergeant. Now their stations were reversed: Sergeant Scotty MacRoberts was in temporary charge of the Royal Northwest Mounted Police at Keen Harbor; Captain Gregory Cavendish had become Constable Cavendish, rookie. But such a small matter as relative rank concerned the grizzle-haired old Scotchman and the aristocratic young Britisher not at all. Despite the fact that Cavendish had the fieldglasses, it was Scotty MacRoberts' keen eyes which had first spotted Joe Indigo, the big negro. Thereafter, however, it was Cavendish who followed the black man's movements.

"Although 'tis an angel, ye are, Miss Kane," Sergeant Scotty rumbled, "ye are minus the wings. An' it's wings I wish ye had the noo. If ye could fly away, ye see, me an' Greg could go ashore an' argy with that black feller. Do ye see any others, Greg, me lad?"

"If you'd only be quiet, Scotty," Cavendish complained. "Every time you speak, the bally boat rocks. Devilish erratic, these glasses, y'know. Up and down, down and up! Could have sworn there one time that there were a dozen—ah—niggers. But, ah! now, I'm seeing things, Scotty! Why, deuce take it, old onion, there's a blooming army of them. What I mean, scads of them, y'know. A beefy feller with a Roman nose. . . ."

"Crow Mord," Scotty MacRoberts interpreted.

"—and a red-headed Johnny with a limp."

"Big Tim Paradene," Scotty identified.

"—an Italian with no end of excellent teeth—and—the black boy. And, my word, Scotty, that—ah—black feller has rings in his ears! Curtain rings, no doubt. And what a bruiser! Really, you know, if poor Distenn has fallen into the hands of those ruffians I doubt if there'll be enough of him left to—er—ah—permit of—ah—decent burial."

Scotty MacRoberts coughed loudly and the young Englishman's ears became very red. He had for the moment forgotten Erlla Kane's persence.

"Do you really think, Sergeant?" the girl asked quietly, "that—that—those men? . . ."

"Not on your life, miss," the grizzle-haired policeman interrupted loudly. "If they had run into Corporal Dan Distenn, they wouldn't *all of them* be there. Dan Distenn would of took some of 'em with him. Nay, Dan's all right. Don't ye doubt it, lass."

"But—that dead man—back there?" the girl persisted. "You said he had been killed?"

"More likely drowned," the old

policeman lied. He swallowed hard. Mike Malpas was missing from that gang, too, but he could see no percentage in mentioning this.

Although Scotty MacRoberts had turned the big canoe toward shore, he purposely paddled slowly in order to have time to think. In his own mind he was convinced that Dan Distenn had contacted with Crow Mord's gang of gold thieves and killers. Whether or not Distenn was alive was problematical. In any case, however, his duty was clear. There up among those rocks was Crow Mord and several of his gang. Every one of those men was badly wanted by the police. Dangerous as the venture appeared to be, it was up to him and Cavendish to tackle that gang. The one obstacle was Erlla Kane.

Just before they reached the shore, the old policeman hit upon a possible way out of the difficulty. He drove the big Indian canoe well up on the sand, then untied the lightweight canvas trailer. He took Erlla Kane's arm firmly. "You'll be leavin' us, miss," he said. "I recall ye are handy with a paddle. Into this little feller with ye."

"But, Sergeant," the girl protested. "If—he—he is up there, he—may be hurt. I. . . ."

"An' I'm tellin' ye again, lass," the old officer interrupted, "wherever Dan Distenn is, he's all right. Don't ye fret your pretty head. But me an' Constable Cavendish are t' do some fightin'. Poor marksmen, those brooders are. A stray shot might hit ye, do ye ken, lass?" He patted the girl's shoulder with a huge paw. And as she hesitated, he half lifted her into the canoe.

"Watch out for the rapids," he cautioned her. "Beach her by the big boulder just this side of them. Ye know where I mean? We'll be pickin' ye up, there."

Erlla Kane nodded dumbly. As she reluctantly picked up the paddle, Scotty MacRoberts gave the little canoe a mighty shove, and Erlla Kane was in midstream and being borne swiftly along with the current before she could make a move to carry out the half-formulated plan which had occurred to her.

Woman's intuition is a subject of much joking comment. In most cases this intangible quality is greatly exaggerated. When a woman is in love, however, there is no doubt but that some subtle sixth sense does serve her in connection with that loved one. Erlla Kane loved Dan Distenn, and, for some absolutely unknown reason, she felt strongly that her place was back there with Scotty MacRoberts and Greg Cavendish.

Even when she found herself being carried downstream at a rapid rate of speed, she had no intention of continuing to that big rock that MacRoberts had mentioned.

At a spot where the swift water slipped around a sandbar into two separate channels, she expertly turned the canoe in shore. Half a mile in the rear was that gleaming sandspit and the two red-coated policemen. The girl stole a hasty glance upstream. She heard a shot, then her wide eyes focused upon the figure of a man clinging, flylike, to the face of the cliff opposite the beached canoe. Distant as that downward creeping figure was, Erlla Kane instantly recognized Dan Distenn. And Cavendish was shooting at Distenn! Even as the girl cried out in futile protest, Cavendish fired again. That clinging figure seemed to waver in midair. Then Dan Distenn dropped, outward and down into space. . . .

CHAPTER VI

The Fight on the Beach

ERLLA KANE had not heard the shots fired by Mord's men, the intervening walls having deadened the sounds. But she had scarcely reached midstream when a hail of lead spattered about the two police-

men. It was Greg Cavendish who first espied the ragged, wild-looking figure racing along the skyline atop the precipice above. The sun was behind Distenn, hence his running figure was merely a rapidly moving blur. Neither MacRoberts nor Cavendish recognized him. Even when he stood almost directly above, they did not know him. His voice carried across the stream and came echoing back to them in waves of unintelligible sound. They understood nothing he said. When he started down the cliff, Cavendish fired. "Save your bullets, boy," MacRoberts cautioned. "Whoever he is, he has nae gun, anyhoo."

But Greg Cavendish did not hear, or if he did hear, paid no attention. He fired three shots and missed each time. The angle of trajectory was unusual to say the least, but Greg Cavendish rather fancied himself as a rifle shot. Three failures in a row piqued him. With half-spent bullets from Mord's crew flying all about, he knelt in the sand and sighted very carefully.

MacRoberts had continued and was two hundred yards away when the young Britisher's fourth shot found its mark. MacRoberts was busy with his own gun at the moment, spraying the rocks up on the hillside with hot lead. He did not see the ragged stranger fall. Neither did Gregory Cavendish witness the result of his last shot. A thirty-thirty Winchester slug, traveling high and hissing as it sped sidewise in dying flight, struck him between the eyes. A shrill, thin cry breathed out through the Englishman's lips as he crumpled back upon the sand.

Gregory Cavendish's fourth shot had gouged an ugly groove along Dan Distenn's neck. It was more the shock of the high-powered bullet crashing into the rocks so close to his face than the wound itself that caused him to lose his hold on the slippery rock. The instant he felt his grip giving away, he thrust outward with all his strength. This thoughtful action prevented him from falling straight down among the jagged-edged boulders thirty feet below. He landed on his hands and feet at the edge of the sandspit. The force of the fall threw him off balance, and he pitched headlong into a mass of freshet-soaked brambles. The thorny bushes cut him painfully, but he was scarcely aware of these minor injuries. Jumping to his feet, he ran swiftly along the yellow shore. He nearly fell over Greg Cavendish's dead body. He scooped up the Englishman's rifle without stopping. Cavendish was beyond attention. Scotty MacRoberts was in serious trouble.

The old policeman had fallen back until he stood beside the big canoe. He had been thrice wounded and was bleeding profusely about the head. "Dang ye!" he gritted. "Come out from behind them rocks! Oh, if I only had my forty-five-seventy! Greg, lad, where are ye?"

Scotty MacRoberts turned as Dan Distenn ran up. The hot gun in the old policeman's gnarled hands swung half around, but the barrel of that gun lowered instantly. "Dan, boy!" he cried. "*Is* it you?"

Dan Distenn's mouth formed a smile, but his mad eyes stared blankly into his old friend's face. "They're in a hole," he said hoarsely. "You can't get them out. Go away."

Scotty MacRoberts moistened his dry lips. "Dan," he said. "What ails ye, lad?"

Again that vacuous smile. "Cavvy is dead," he informed.

Scotty MacRoberts' big hands were trembling. "Dead?" he repeated. "No, no—you're joking me. But what ails ye, Dan?"

And then, suddenly, Sergeant Scotty MacRoberts understood. "God," he muttered reverently, "the boy is mad!"

Dan Distenn grinned foolishly but there was nothing foolish or mad in the way he manipulated Cavendish's rifle. Dropping on his knee in front

of MacRoberts, he sighted on a particular brush clump up on the hillside behind which he knew Crow Mord himself was crouching. An inarticulate cry answered the shot and Crow Mord jumped hastily backward, his left arm made useless by a bullet through the shoulder.

Scotty MacRoberts went away, returning a moment later carrying the young Englishman's body. Very gently the old policeman placed the dead man in the big canoe.

Distenn was wriggling forward and up toward those mounded boulders which sheltered the enemy. Bullets channeled the sand on all sides of him, but he seemed to bear a charmed life. A dozen bullets had missed him by narrow margins when he reached a jutting rock halfway up the hillside. He turned to call Scotty MacRoberts.

Just as his eyes fastened upon his old friend, Scotty MacRoberts' craggy body toppled forward, then sprawled sidewise upon the ground. The watching man saw the old Scotchman's hand press against his left breast. That hand came away red with blood. With one last spasmodic effort, MacRoberts pulled himself half upright, clinging to the sides of the canoe. He dropped on his knee and leaned back heavily against the prow of the boat. "White teeth," he muttered, "I seen ye! White teeth."

Scotty MacRoberts was dying, but he wasn't ready—quite yet—to die. He had seen the man who shot him—a round, olive-skinned face and many white teeth. Tony Torrito! Those white teeth swam in a misty blur before the old officer's eyes as he lifted the heavy rifle.

Tony Torrito knew that he had scored a hit. He was babbling excitedly of his success. His white teeth gleamed in a satisfied smile as he squinted down at Scotty MacRoberts' bulky, red-coated figure. The wavering gun in the old policeman's chilling hands roared. Abruptly, Tony Torrito's white-toothed smile was obliterated by a thirty-thirty Winchester slug that crashed those teeth and pierced his brain.

Dan Distenn saw Scotty MacRoberts sprawl limply backward, half in the canoe and half out. Then, as once before that day, a mad fury took possession of him. Swinging the gun above his head, yelling like a war-crazed Indian, he ran straight toward that nest of hidden gunmen. Only one bullet sought him out and this one went wild. Tony Torrito had just sprawled backward, screaming in his death agony. Crow Mord had toppled over in a faint, suffering from loss of blood from a bullet wound. It was Tim Paradene who faced the madman. Surely the luck of the Irish was with Big Tim at that moment. Dan Distenn's gun swung downward within six feet of the big Irishman's chest. But when the madman tugged on the trigger the hammer clicked on space. Frantically he worked the mechanism of the gun and pulled the trigger a second time. Again there was a metallic click—nothing more. . . .

The rifle was empty and Dan had no shells. The instant he realized this, Distenn swung the gun over his head. Big Tim Paradene dodged, striving at the same time to bring his own rifle into play. The heavy rifle barrel struck him across a shoulder, and such was the force behind it that he sprawled flat upon his face among the rocks. Distenn saw Slim Garrideb creeping up from the side, but he didn't see Joe Indigo. The big negro crept, catlike, toward Dan Distenn's back. The black man could have shot the mad policeman down a dozen times. But here was a chance to fight the way he liked to fight. He swung the rifle over his head and brought the barrel down with all his strength on top of Dan Distenn's head!

The clubbed gun broke off short at the stock. This lucky accident kept Distenn's skull from being crushed. Even so, the blow was a terrible one. Dan Distenn sprawled flat upon his

face, both arms outstretched, fingers clutching at the rocks. . . .

Both the policeman and Crow Mord were brought back to consciousness by copious doses of scalding brandy administered by Big Tim Paradene. White-faced and shaking, Crow Mord blinked the tears out of his eyes and inspected the prize which had fallen into his hands. As the hot liquor banished the squeamishness caused by loss of blood from his wound, his quick thoughts began to plan ways and means of persuading Dan Distenn to divulge the location of the King Eagle gold. Distenn had been on that barge when it rode down through Wild Horse Rapids. The scow had been wrecked, of course, but in some miraculous manner Distenn had escaped. He would know where the wreck took place, Mord figured. Four thousand pounds in gold dust could not travel far, even in the swiftest water, after being spewed out of the wrecked boat.

But it would be no simple matter to get Dan Distenn to talk. Crow Mord knew many ways of loosening men's tongues. But Dan Distenn was different. He was hard as nails; his iron courage was a byword throughout the entire northwest. None of the usual persuasive measures would work on a man like that.

The injured policeman, still gagging from the effects of the brandy, had groped to his feet. His eyes were squinted half-shut as a result of the terrible pain that wracked his head. Blood covered all one side of his face from the scalp wound caused by the negro's gun. He took to pacing back and forth across the little open space. His half-shut eyes stared from face to face, blankly, unseeing. A constant mumble of unrelated words tumbled out of his mouth.

Crow Mord watched with a puzzled frown. He turned finally to Big Tim Paradene. "Cuckoo," he muttered. "Crazy as a loon!"

The big Irishman nodded. Suddenly Slim Garrideb cried out. He pointed excitedly down toward the valley. Erlla Kane had come out upon the yellow sandspit and was running along the shore toward Scotty MacRoberts' big Indian canoe. She hesitated only for an instant beside the canoe and its gruesome burden, then ran on toward the spot where she had seen Dan Distenn fall.

Crow Mord stared disinterestedly for a moment, then his dull eyes suddenly grew bright and he jumped to his feet. "It's one of those nurses from Keen Harbor," he said. "You, Joe, and you, Slim, go get her!"

Joe Indigo started at once down the rocky hillside. But Slim Garrideb hesitated. "You'll be takin' an awful chance, Chief," he protested. "She's a nurse, like you say, an' hired by the government. If anything should happen to her, we'd be out o' luck fer fair. It would be worse than pluggin' a redcoat. . . ."

"Do as I tell you!" Mord interrupted angrily.

Slim Garrideb shrugged and reluctantly followed the black man.

Crow Mord's eyes squinted shrewdly as he watched Dan Distenn's drooping figure. The policeman crouched now on a flat rock, head in hands. Things hadn't broken as well as they might have broken for Crow Mord; still, he saw a possible way out. Owing to that blow on the head, Distenn was crazy. Temporarily so, no doubt. Still he was in bad shape in other ways. His entire body was covered with insect bites, and his sturdy frame clearly showed the ravages of fever. The first necessity was to see that Dan Distenn did not die. This would require skilled medical attention and careful nursing. That was where Erlla Kane would come in. He had no intention of harming the girl. Indeed, he intended to take very good care of her. Much depended upon her nursing skill—one million dollars, to be exact.

Mord sprang to his feet suddenly

as Dan Distenn crumpled sidewise to the ground. For a moment he was scared. But the injured man had only fainted. His heart was beating strongly.

CHAPTER VII

Prisoners

AFTER it has passed, madness leaves the flavor of an unpleasant nightmare. Dan Distenn had been living in a sort of morbid dreamland for many days. The fortnight following his collapse was a continuation of this dream existence—with a difference. Despite the fact that he was delirious most of the time, the experience was not altogether an unpleasant one. Like a sick child pampered by a solicitous mother, he was curiously contented with his lot. The answer, of course, was that Erlla Kane was at his bedside. Not once during day or night did she leave him for more than a few minutes at a time.

It was on the morning of the fifteenth day that he awoke, clear-eyed and mentally alert. He was lying on a comfortable bunk in a rock-walled room. A single window, heavily barred, breathed gusts of clear, cool air in his face. The sunlight made golden patterns on the floor.

Erlla Kane was seated at his side, looking down at him. There was nothing melodramatic about it, no fluttering sighs. He only smiled up at her.

"Hello," was all that he said.

"It's about time you woke up," she chided in her best professional manner. Nevertheless, her eyes were bright and she was breathing rapidly.

Dan Distenn's black-rimmed eyes circled the interior of his prison. He scowled perplexedly. The last thing he remembered clearly was that strip of slimy mud on the shore of that little inlet and the flies, the mosquitoes, the terrible heat. He recalled vaguely Mad Yock Hayden; the cloudburst; the faces of Crow Mord, Big Tim Paradene and Joe Indigo peering out at him through gray curtains of driving rain; the descent into that liquid maelstrom; the hurrying mist the next morning; then, the clear coolness and Mike Malpas' fire. Of the fight on the cliff, he had little recollection. He knew Scotty MacRoberts and Greg Cavendish had been there, but he recalled them only vaguely. The one thing he did remember very clearly out of that last exciting chapter of his dream existence was Erlla Kane in that big canoe.

Just how he had gotten where he was he had no idea.

Erlla Kane explained briefly. "—I've omitted many details," she concluded. "You must go to sleep now. When you wake up next time, I'll tell you more."

But Dan Distenn wasn't quite satisfied. "They've treated you well, you say?"

"Oh, yes," Erlla Kane assured him. "Of course they have. Your life is worth exactly one million dollars to them. I'm the doctor. I promised them. . . ."

"One million dollars?" Distenn repeated, a question in his voice.

"The King Eagle gold," Erlla prompted. "You are the only living man who knows where that gold is at the present moment. Mord expects you to lead him to it."

Dan Distenn laughed hollowly. "I remember—the barge," he mused. "And I remember drifting down through Wild Horse Rapids. Next thing I recall I was eating scorched bacon beside a little fire and looking down into Mike Malpas' battered face."

"You mean," the girl queried brokenly, "that you don't know where the gold is?"

"Haven't the slightest idea," the sick man confirmed.

"Then you were out of your head all that time?"

"Must have been," Distenn admitted.

Erlla Kane was troubled. For the

first time Distenn noticed that there were red spots under her eyes, as though she had been crying. He smiled reassuringly. His lean hand found one of her hands and pressed it firmly.

"Don't worry," he told her. "I'm not hitting on all six from the neck up just yet. But I've got a plan that may work. So long as we are up here in the Crow's Nest under Mord's very eyes, there won't be much chance of a rescue. It's up to us to fool them. Just you and me, Erlla. And we'll do it. If Mord asks questions, tell him nothing. Doggone, I'm sleepy. . . ."

When Distenn next awoke it was night. A light burned on a table, and Erlla Kane was dozing in a comfortable chair. She awoke the instant he moved. Not wishing to disturb her, he closed his eyes quickly and feigned sleep. He had no idea how long he maintained this 'possumlike pose. When he next opened his eyes, yellow sunlight was streaking the stone floor.

Erlla Kane brought him broth and he ate hungrily. He felt much stronger and his head was clear. "Mord looked in on you early this morning," Erlla informed him. "I lied to him. Told him there was no change."

Dan Distenn grinned his approval. "We'll have to play a waiting game, Erlla," he told her. "Never let on to him that I don't know where that gold barge went aground. He thinks I was quite sane up to the time Joe Indigo hit me over the head. Therefore, so far as he can see, there is no reason why I shouldn't know where the King Eagle gold is. Let him keep thinking just that. It's our only chance. Don't you see?"

Erlla Kane nodded dubiously.

"Now then," Distenn went on quickly, "I've got to get my strength back. There's not much room for exercise here, but it'll have to serve. He thinks I'm still cuckoo. We've got to *keep* him thinking that way. In other words, until I get back on my feet again physically, I'll do my best to act like a nut. Shouldn't be difficult, should it?"

Erlla Kane smiled slightly. "I can't bear to see you—look like that—Dan," she muttered.

Dan Distenn laughed. "Don't be silly," he chided. "It's our only chance. Don't you see how it is? If he knew I was all right again, he'd be dragging me out pronto on a stretcher, if necessary, to lead him to that dust. At present I couldn't put up much of a scrap, even if I had the chance. I'm as groggy as a seasick schoolma'am. I've got to get back on my toes. Meanwhile, do your best to get hold of a gun."

Erlla Kane smiled slowly. From beneath the cane seat of the chair in which she was sitting, she drew a long-barreled Colt forty-five. "I borrowed it from Big Tim Paradene when he was drunk," she explained simply. "He never even missed it that I know of."

Distenn was jubilant. He came to his feet, reaching for the gun. Within the next instant, he was lying flat on his back on the floor, staring blankly up into Erlla Kane's face. "Damned fool!" he swore.

"Not quite so bad as that," the girl reproved gently. "But you should have known better."

He was breathing hard when he finally lay on the bunk once more. Erlla handed him the pistol, and he thrust it under his pillow as the clump, clump of heavy steps sounded outside the big log door.

It was Crow Mord and Joe Indigo. Distenn lay back on his pillow and stared blankly at his visitors. Crow Mord stood, hands on hips, chewing thoughtfully at his black mustache. "Better today, eh nurse?" he rumbled.

"Yes," Erlla Kane answered shortly.

The negro, Distenn noticed, never took his eyes off the girl. She realized that, too, and fidgeted uneasily. Crow Mord's black eyes were never still. There was the suspicion

of a smile on his thick lips when he finally went away.

"How did I make out?" Distenn queried. "Some actor, what?"

Erlla Kane bit her lip. Her eyes were troubled. "I don't know, Dan," she said finally. "I'm afraid. . . ."

"Of what?" Dan prompted.

"I'm afraid you're a pretty terrible actor," she answered. "You looked wild enough. I'll grant you that. But —not like you looked before. Maybe you deceived Mord, but I doubt it. Your face, particularly your eyes, are —well—they're just different, that's all."

At first Distenn was inclined to argue. Every man *thinks* he is an accomplished actor. In reality, of course, most men are poor actors.

He remained reluctant to admit his failure as an actor, however. "Shucks," he muttered, "I thought I was doin' swell. Anyhow, it's our best bet. We'll keep it up for a few days and see what happens. Give me a hand, will you, Erlla? I'd plumb enjoy goin' for a walk with you."

The days that followed were busy ones. Although Erlla ostensibly brought the sick man only the usual liquid foods, she smuggled in fresh meat and vegetables at least twice a day. Distenn's strength returned quickly. With the girl listening at the door, he kept in almost constant motion, walking swiftly, swinging his arms, and, at the end of a week, exercising as strenuously as though he were out in the open on an autumn trail.

Crow Mord looked in at least once a day. Each time, Distenn, warned in time, lay sprawled out full length on the bunk when the bandit chief appeared.

For several days Erlla Kane had been acting queerly. Distenn, preoccupied with his own physical problem, was unaware that anything was wrong until she appeared one day, running, and squeezed breathlessly into the cave, closing the door quickly behind her. Her cheeks were white, her eyes staring. Distenn was instantly at her side.

"What is it, dear?" he queried, his arm about her trembling shoulders.

For a second she clung tightly to him. "That—that—nigger," she half sobbed. "No, no—he hasn't touched me. Up to a few days ago he only looked. But he's been getting bolder lately. Today he followed me to the kitchen, watched while I prepared your broth, and walked right at my heels all the way back. That black devil scares me, Dan. I know it's foolish. He won't dare touch me. Still? . . ."

Dan Distenn's square jaws tightened. "Get him in here, Erlla," he said quietly. "No hurry. But next time you go to the kitchen, ask him to help you, or something like that. Just get him in here where I can get my hands on him."

But Erlla Kane shook her head. She was no longer trembling. "That would be foolish, Dan, and you know it," she said calmly. "After all, he's little more than half brute. He doesn't know any better. Anyhow, I'm just a silly little fool. You know as well as I do that he wouldn't dare lay a hand upon me. They have instructions from Mord, all of them. I don't think you believe it, but they really have been mighty decent to me."

With his arm about the girl's waist, Dan Distenn strode to his bunk. He took the gun from under the pillow and carefully tested the weapon's well-oiled mechanism. He then thrust the gun inside his shirt and down under his belt. The pistol was scarcely out of sight when Crow Mord and Slim Garrideb suddenly appeared in the sun-brightened doorway!

(Cornered by his powerful enemies, Dan Distenn must talk or fight. The bluff of insanity is over, but what next? Read the next instalment in Second November ACE-HIGH MAGAZINE, on sale at your newsstand on October 21st, and find out.)

PARTNERS

By Eldred Stephenson

To Flash, Sig was much more than his master. They were partners.

FLEET as the wind, with Sig Omlie crouched in the saddle, Flash streaked after the escaping stallion. His flashing legs made a soft blur of motion. With neck stretched, back level, ears flat against his head, he shot like a silver-gray arrow up the hot, sage-purple valley.

He ran gamely, straining every muscle, every nerve, every fiber—because he ran for Sig. Sig was his master, his man-god. For Sig, Flash would run himself dead on his feet.

A quarter mile ahead thundered Diable, the wild one, a famous coal-black stallion. His massive body crashed straight through the chaparral, through scrub oak and stunted cedar. He plunged blindly, seldom swerving, spurred only by the brute fear. Unhampered by a rider, he had the edge in speed.

But Flash's cunning, his cool thinking, discounted Sig's weight. He had "sabe," Flash, and plenty of it! Keener than Diable, he never crashed blindly through chaparral. Instead, he knowingly searched out his best path. By darts, turns, twists, he swept over the smooth footing, dodged the rough. His name expressed his action—in his swift gliding, Flash literally flowed through the thickets.

In Sig's brown hand, the reins dangled slack. He had learned long ago to trust Flash. They worked together. Together they tingled to the chase. Their two hardened bodies, tuned in motion, even in thinking, rose and fell so naturally that they seemed grown together.

They had been partners for years, these two. Partners, until Sig became drunk with the vision of owning Diable. Then abruptly he forgot Flash. He forgot their years together, their friendship, their constant sharing of danger and work.

Flash surged on, game, nervy, clever. And still Sig failed to reward him. He gave him no word of praise, no pat of encouragement, none of the attention that Flash had learned to know, to seek, to love. He only leaned low, sucked in his breath, and feasted his eyes on the black outlaw thundering ahead.

Flash he understood, but Diable was something new, an unknown, unconquered horse. A furious horse that had never been ridden, and Sig was a man who had never been thrown. Diable's untamed fury, his brute rage, was a challenge to Sig.

As he visioned himself catching Diable—throwing him, breaking him, riding him!—the blood pulsed hot in his veins. Flash was a great horse, but Diable was greater. Flash was gentle. Diable was savage, wild; he was a fighter. He could skin Flash seven ways for Sunday!

A man-killer, too, this Diable! Once he had been caught, corralled, given the rope. Wranglers had hogtied his body, but not his fighting spirit.

He killed three bronc-peelers, famous ones. Threw and trampled them to death. During all his captivity, his crazed hatred for man deepened. Riders decided that he was insane—the born killer—Satan's stallion!

Even after he escaped, his evil reputation grew. He stole mares from all the basin ranches. Twice again he came upon an unmounted cowpoke—and savagely murdered. At last, the ranchers put a price on his head. Gold, five hundred dollars, would be paid the man who shot the outlaw.

"Kill him!" Sig laughed at the thought. "Huh! I'll catch that brute, an' break him! I'll ride his ornery hide clean off his bones! Then mebbe he'll come to his senses an' be a world beater!"

Diable thundered straight on, straight up the mountain valley of bunch grass, purple sage, and scrub cedar. He was unwittingly trapping himself. The chase had been long, and weary—three weeks. Sometimes in mad bursts of speed as today. Again just trailing, trailing. But now was the end at hand.

Just ahead, the lonely basin narrowed. Rimmed by sheer cliffs, by spirelike peaks, it terminated abruptly in a box canyon, a natural trap. And there Diable would be forced to whirl, to race back. And there Sig planned to rope him, to try to rope him.

Two clouds of dust, they flew on up the valley, both horses blowing, their nostrils distended, foam flicking off their heaving sides. Diable, a dark-lathered streak, stretched out. Flash flowed behind, cleaving the sage-scented wind like a fleet greyhound. The cliffs, the cedars, the narrowing canyon, flashed by.

Sig hunched low. "I got him! Got him!"

The black stallion thundered on, straight to the head of the rocky box canyon. Then he suddenly saw the blank wall. He lunged to the right, then to the left. But he was trapped. Sheer rock ahead, to either side. And behind, streaking down like a lightning bolt, the horse that carried the hated man thing! In baffled fury, squealing with rage, Diable reared straight up and pawed the air.

Sig snatched his rope, shook it out. He swiftly built a loop. He whirled it round and round above his wind-flattened sombrero.

Tossing his head, Diable whistled, shrilly, challengingly. He glared back over his massive shoulder. He shook himself like a wildcat. Then suddenly, with eyes rolling murderously, he whirled. Stretched low, he came racing back, hugging the left canyon wall.

Flash smoothly swerved. With intelligent head pointed like an arrow at the flying stallion, he came shooting in. The gap between them magically vanished.

Sig rose suddenly in the stirrups. Abruptly his loop hummed faster, his brown wrist snapped. Like a striking snake the rope hissed through the air. The loop circled, and narrowed and flashed true as a well-aimed bullet.

It dropped like a plummet around the stallion's neck. Flash instantly whirled. He pointed after the thundering stallion, skidded to a halt, and sat back on his haunches. He stiffened his forelegs, took the shock.

The rope snapping taut, yanked up Diable's head. As though hitting a stone wall, he stopped suddenly. He rose in the air, somersaulted over backward, and crashed to the ground in a cloud of dust. The terrific fall half stunned him. But he pawed furiously, trying to regain his feet.

Sig grabbed his second lariat. He quickly slid from the saddle. Rope coiled in left hand, loop in right, he dodged behind Diable.

Flash played his part deftly, proudly, for Sig. Straining back with quivering nose pointed along the humming rope, he fixed his starry eyes on the struggling stallion. He watched warily, circling, backing off, and never giving an inch of slack. His footwork was neat, dainty as a fencer's. Alone, with neither rider nor commands, he cleverly held Diable. As much as Sig himself, he was making this catch.

And Sig knew it, counted on it, yet paid him no attention. He half crouched behind Diable. He dragged the loop back, below his right hip. With eyes narrowed, he watched for his cast, then saw his chance.

He darted ahead. His arm lashed out and forward, his wrist snapped, and the loop flashed. Swinging low, it whipped out just above the ground, and nipped the stallion's hind legs.

Sig sprang back. He twisted sideways, and snubbed across his chap-protected thigh. Holding tight, he backed off, wrapped the rope around a stout cedar and made his knot.

Flash's work was easy now. He knew just what to do, and did it. He strained back on his rope, stretched out the helpless stallion. And Diable, half choked, relaxed at last.

As Sig ran forward, Flash pointed his ears, and eagerly nickered. But Sig, thinking only of Diable, ignored the request for praise. From the saddle, he snatched a coiled halter. He sprang back to the stunned outlaw, slipped on the halter, and made it fast to a scrub oak. Then he indifferently freed Flash, and turned his exultant gaze to Diable.

The back outlaw lurched to his feet. His crazed eyes still bulged from the choking he had received. Foam-flecked, panting, he trembled in every muscle. Yet instantly his lips rolled back over red gums and yellow teeth. He reared, bawled loudly, and savagely hit the halter.

Wide-legged, grinning, Sig stood watching him. Without taking his glance from the struggling stallion, he rolled a cigarette, lit it, and flipped away the match. He rubbed his brown hands together, and his narrowed eyes glinted excited admiration.

"Boy," he burst out, "you're a fighter! But that's what I like in you. We'll fight it out, you an' me! An' mister, the day's coming when you'll fight for me instead of against me!"

Behind Sig, Flash eagerly waited for his reward, the pats, the drawled chiding. For always Sig's words, his voice, his smell, sent a warm tingle through Flash's sleek body.

But queerly his master paid him no attention today—he only stared at the fighting outlaw and walked slowly around him. A few steps Flash followed as a dog would. He stamped impatiently. He arched his neck, pointed his ears, and whinnied eagerly. But still the master did not turn.

Flash trotted forward. He demanded attention by playfully shoving his head against Sig's shoulder.

Sig scowled, reached back, and pushed the nuzzling head away. "Look out!" he snapped impatiently. He kept his gaze riveted on the captured stallion.

Flash halted suddenly, snorted, tossed his head in surprise. He stared at Sig. Then slowly a strange baffled look clouded his starry eyes. For a long time, he watched Sig. But finally, dejected, he turned away. He lowered his proud head, and began cropping grass.

DURING the days that followed, Sig was not intentionally cruel to Flash. But he was drunk with Diable, with the vision of himself riding Diable. He had eyes for nothing else. And Flash, used to attention, suffered—suffered the more because he could not understand.

Sig lived for the moment when he would eventually mount Diable. In that moment he would begin the greatest battle of his life. Between man and horse, without quarter, without mercy, it would be a fight to the finish.

Meanwhile, there in the mountain valley, the cowboy brought all his skillful "horse sabe" to play on Diable's fury. He talked to him constantly, placed his saddle, his spurs, even his garments, where Diable might see, and sniff, and learn to know. He roped him, waved a saddle blanket before him. Often he threw, tied, and saddled him, and left him saddled for hours.

But against Diable's hatred, all Sig's efforts failed. They only inflamed the stallion's rage. Day and night he fought the halter, pitched, squealed, and slashed the air with his wicked forefeet.

One day, almost with a sense of shock, Sig noted a peculiar quality about Diable's bloodshot eyes—they were extremely close together.

Even then Sig kept up his patient efforts. Yet more and more he became convinced that there was only one thing left to do. Only one way to conquer this demon horse. And that was to ride him, and ride him to a finish!

So obsessed was Sig with matching himself against Diable that he failed to see the forlorn change taking place in Flash. Neither did Flash know it—he was only aware of hot, tumultuous feeling.

First he was mournfully dejected. From his picket rope he gazed at his master, still waiting for words and attention. But time passed and neither came.

For a time, wonderingly, he watched Diable fighting his halter. And then it seemed he must not look at Diable—and that was jealousy. For days he kept his starry, wide-spaced eyes off the struggling stallion and pointed down the hazy, sage-purple valley.

It seemed then that the bunch grass, the sparkling mountain water, were subtly affected. They lost their sweet tang and no longer drew saliva to his dry tongue. He was bewildered, sick with loneliness, lonely as only a horse can be who has lost his man partner. For Flash was deserted, a back number now. Another, the black one, had taken his place. Sig had forgotten him. He had forgotten their years together, their sharing of lonely camps, of work and danger, of range and trail.

And then one day, a week after Diable's capture, Sig mounted Flash and rode him close to the black outlaw. As they drew near, Diable showed his teeth and watched them with wickedly rolling eyes.

Of a sudden his ears twitched back. Squealing viciously, he lunged forward. Long head shot out, and yellow fangs flashed. He savagely grabbed blood from Flash's silky shoulder.

Flash leaped in surprise. And then abruptly he whirled and showed his spunk. With forefeet flying, he reared and sharply struck the stallion.

Exclaiming angrily, Sig yanked him aside. His spurs dug in. His quirt flashed up, whistled down, and cracked across Flash's flank.

Like a startled deer, Flash jumped away. He was suddenly trembling, violently shaking in every muscle. He snorted, shook his head. His act, his striking Diable, had been wholly unconscious. Diable had bitten him; and instinctively, courageously, he had fought back. Flash had only been trying to protect himself, to protect his master.

And Sig had quirted him. He was hurt, bewildered. But it was not the quirt which had cut so deep—it was the knowledge that Sig, his master, had struck him. For Sig had never done that before.

THAT Sig's patience should finally break was inevitable. One morning, in sparkling sunlight, he stood watching the sullenly fighting outlaw.

Wide-legged, thumbs hooked in cartridge belt, he puffed rapidly at his cigarette. But suddenly he flipped it away. His shoulders squared and his eyes narrowed.

"You black brute!" he grunted. "We're done foolin'! We're going to fight—right now!"

He set swiftly to work. His decision once made, he tingled with nervous eagerness. He swept aside caution, his better judgment which tried to warn him: "He'll kill you. He'll kill you!"

Whirling his lariat, he nipped the stallion's rear feet. He snubbed, threw, and stretched him. With Diable helpless, he quickly dragged up the saddle, wormed it over the quivering back.

Poking the latigo under with a curved stick, he hooked it out from the opposite side. He yanked it tight, to its very last notch. Then, for a moment, he stood above Diable, grimly staring down at him.

"You're going to give me plenty!" he decided. "But me, I'm going to give you plenty! An' in the end we'll see who's on top!"

He clutched his knife. Bending over, he slashed free the rear feet. He shot one leg over the down horse, pegged the stirrup, and grabbed the reins. Crouched there, half in the saddle, half out, he reached suddenly forward. He cut the rope from Diable's neck. Diable was loose.

At last the fight to the finish was on! The horse that had never been ridden, and the man who had never been thrown! And Sig knew he must ride for his life. Because Diable always killed. To be thrown was to die!

For just a second the stallion lay motionless. But Sig actually felt those mighty muscles bunching. He felt them crawl, tighten, coil like huge snakes.

Then suddenly, with the wrath of hot dynamite, Diable exploded. He writhed, pawed, and lunged to his feet.

Sig bouncing up with him, lithely caught his balance. He kicked his loose foot to stirrup, firmly seated himself. Hauling in on the reins, he vised with his knees and shouted a husky challenge.

Diable bawled back defiance. He stood, wide-legged, quivering. Suddenly his evil head stretched around, and red sunken eyes glared hatred at this thing which clung to his back. Yellow teeth flashing, he grabbed at Sig's leg. But Sig was ready. His knee jerked aside, and his quirt smacked Diable's face.

Springing sideways, the outlaw spun like a top. He stopped suddenly,

whirled furiously in the opposite direction. But unable to shake his rider, he halted again.

Then abruptly his great head whizzed down, threaded between shaggy fetlocks, and his massive shoulders leaped into a peak. He shot straight up. In mid-air he swapped ends, and crashed to ground with a terrific thud—so hard that a nearby cedar shed a sudden shower of dry needles.

Sig's spine seemed driven through his head. Choked with dust, he was knocked dizzy; but clamping with his knees, he stuck like a burr.

And then Diable, insane demon that he was, really uncorked. Squealing, bawling, he recklessly pitched from side to side. His hoofs thundered. With lean head lashing, he reared upright. He pranced on his hind feet, and pawed the air with his front.

Fearful of crashing over backward, Sig quirted him between the ears. Diable thudded to ground. He chased his tail, violently shook himself, pitched, snorted, and bared his clashing teeth. He hammered Sig against the creaking saddle, wrenched and tossed him until the cowboy's bones were grating in their sockets.

Again Diable bounced up, crashed down, corkscrewed against a cedar and snapped it like a match. He hurtled on, twisting, buckling, weaving in mad, dizzy circles. His writhing head, his flashing feet, his wildly spinning body, all became a blurred, swirling tangle of motion.

Dust rose in acrid clouds. Bawls and thudding hoofs, squeaking leather, Sig's painful gasps and grunts, made bedlam.

As he had never ridden before, Sig was riding now. He was bruised, battered, but fighting grimly. Gasping for breath, he bled at the nose. His teeth were hammered together. In his ears, blood drummed and roared. His neck kinked, his spine popped. And still he kept the saddle.

Sig was game! In nerve, in fire, he was every inch a match for Diable. But under the terrific battering, his body was rapidly numbing. Shocked, dizzy, he reeled in a daze.

Stick! He must stick! A horrible death if thrown! And at last he knew that Diable was not to be conquered. The berserk horse would kill himself first. To live, Sig must ride—ride until the crazed stallion fell dead beneath him!

They corkscrewed on. Sig lost all track of time and space. Around him he saw the mountains wheeling. He was hurling and tossing in a vast red mist. Riding, riding, riding! On through an infinity he whirled and thrashed.

And then for a fraction of a second Diable paused between the tossing mountains. Crouching, he bundled all his mighty muscles. Then again his great head flew down between his fetlocks, his shoulders humped, and he sailed straight up.

Fighting desperately, neither man nor horse had given an inch. But at the very peak of that mighty jump, mere leather failed. From under Diable's bulging belly sounded a sharp crack—the latigo snapped!

As though shot from a cannon, Sig flew over Diable's hunched shoulders. With the saddle still clamped between his legs, he raced through the air and crashed to ground with stunning force. He lay there, helpless.

Diable screamed his bawl of victory. His lean head shot out, lips rolled back, and yellow teeth clashed. He streaked straight at Sig.

And then suddenly there was a second scream of fury. A clarion challenge. And that was Flash!

Swift as a rifle ball, he hit the end of his picket rope. It snapped just like a mere thread. His hoofs thudded. Stretched level, fleet as an arrow, he shot at Diable.

His feet sailed off the ground. In mid-air, like a projectile, he burst against the stallion. They crashed aside. They lunged upright, stretched

their necks, and flew at each other. Their fury was savage, elemental. With hoofs flying, teeth slashing, they leaped in and out, fiercely fighting like two huge wolves.

Sig rolled over, lurched up, and staggered away from stabbing hoofs. But despite his dulled senses, he blinked with amazement. For Flash, neglected Flash, gentle Flash, was loyally fighting for his master! Even as the stallion, he was every inch a fighter!

Sig instinctively gave a hoarse shout. "Get him, Flash! Good boy! Go to it! You can if you will!"

And Flash went. And Diable met him! They were matched, those two, as fighters were never matched before. In stark fury, both were even. Diable had weight. He was the slugger. But Flash had speed, flowing agility. He was the boxer.

With a fierce bawl, Diable sprang forward. He hurled his crushing bulk at his slimmer opponent. Flash, melting to one side, snapped at the stallion's throat. Then he whirled gracefully. He shot back and reared. His sharp hoofs drummed a swift tatoo against Diable's ribs. The outlaw wheeled with great fury, charged again. But again Flash made a lightning grab at his throat, then smoothly glided aside.

They fought on, ripping, tearing, with no mercy, Diable enraged only by the desire to kill, but Flash flaming with jealous loyalty for his master. Diable's heaving sides, his neck, his chest, became streaked with oozing ribbons of red.

Yet his great bulk, his terrific charging, were not to be withstood forever. Flash's flying tactics, his swift wheeling and whirling, soon strained lungs and muscles to the bursting point. He slowed down. Gradually his escapes became more narrow. And gradually Diable forced the fight.

Flash, battling every inch, started a slow retreat, up the box canyon. He gave back toward the rocky cliff-side, the blank wall. Diable instinctively pushed his advantage, fought for close quarters, reared above the silver-gray horse, and tried to pound and batter him to earth. And his hoofs, his teeth, his lunging shoulders, were punishing Flash now.

Soon, even as Diable, the silver-gray horse became streaked with red. More and more his darts and twists lost their flashing speed. Often he was hurled aside. Once he sank to his knees. But only to fly gamely to his feet, to wheel and fight again.

Diable sensed victory. He savagely forced Flash's retreat, beat him back, up the narrow box canyon, all the way to the sheer cliff. Here every advantage favored Diable's lunging style. And here, because he had no choice, Flash stood and fought.

Diable lunged in, crashed his shoulders against the splendid horse. Again Flash sank to his knees. Again he pawed upright. But again, and this time squarely, Diable hit him like a battering ram.

The terrible blow knocked Flash off the ground. He kicked wildly through the air, failed to catch his footing, and crashed flat on his side.

Diable grabbed his chance. He screamed his bawl of victory. Like a bolt he shot forward. With destroying hoofs flying, he reared high above the struggling Flash.

Sig chilled at the sight. An involuntary cry, one of agony, burst from his tight lips. Like a man blind-drunk, he was knocked sober by sudden shock—the shock of seeing Flash giving his life for his master. He saw abruptly that he had been hypnotized by his own desire to conquer Diable, that the outlaw was a killer, a murderer of men; hopelessly, fatally insane!

His love for Flash stormed back. He owed his life to Flash. Why, Flash, keen intelligent Flash, Fighting Flash, was the loyal horse, the truly great horse!

And now, within a split second, Flash would be dead!

Death came suddenly in the lonely valley. For Flash's spirit, his undying will to fight to the end, still flared in that fatal moment.

As Diable's hoofs cut down, the silver-gray horse made his last wild effort. He pawed furiously. He writhed, rolled, and bounded to his feet. Diable missed by inches.

Flash whirled, faced the baffled stallion. And suddenly then, in sheer desperation, he forced the fight himself!

His legs bundled swiftly beneath him. With the snap of steel springs, like a released bolt, he rocketed up and forward. The surprised stallion was momentarily off guard. Flash streaked in front of him. His mouth snapped open, shut—his flashing teeth sank deep in the outlaw's throat.

The speed of Flash's attack swept him past. But there was a terrible ripping sound. Diable reared to his hind legs. His great jaws opened to scream. But no sound came. For Diable's throat was gone.

As the stallion crashed to ground, Flash sprang back. And his dainty hoofs flew at the thing, which writhed beneath him. . . .

FLASH'S smooth coat was streaked and stained. His proud neck was bent. As he walked toward Sig, he wabbled uncertainly. His starry eyes held a look of wonder, of bewilderment, almost of shame.

For a moment, staring, Sig stood like a man in a daze. Then suddenly he rushed forward. He flung his arm over Flash's lathered shoulder. He rubbed and patted his quivering nose.

"Old-timer!" he burst out, and his voice husky. "You—you whipped him! You saved my life! An' me not seein' you of late! I thought he was greater than you. But—why, old-timer, there's never been a horse could equal you. An' there never will be!"

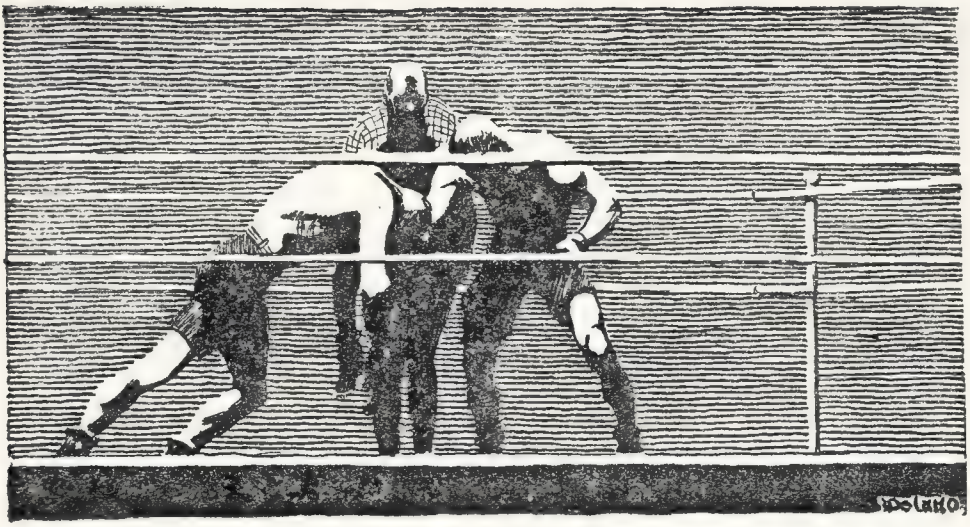
Slowly, Flash stared around at his master. For just a second he seemed to hesitate slightly. Then suddenly his ears pricked. He nickered softly, arched his neck, and playfully shoved his head against Sig.

For he knew that they were partners again, never to separate!

El Sombrero was what men called him, for his hat bore, on its leather band, the names of

FOUR MEN TO GET!

Told as only JOHNSTON McCULLEY can tell it, this thrilling serial will start *in the next issue*



THAT LITTLE PEEWEE

By Eddy Orcutt

Dizzy Jim Hanlon could fight; there was little doubt about that. But he would far rather play the clown, even in a big fight like this one, and clowning meant a licking. G. B., Jim's scrappy little manager, could make him behave, but he was nowhere to be seen. Yet Hanlon saw—something.

THE word had got out that "G. B." was missing. Perhaps it had come from the hotel where the wizened, wild little Irish fight manager had reserved a suite. Perhaps it had come from the airport where "Dizzy Jim" Hanlon had arrived from training camp. Perhaps it had come from the sheriff's office or from highway patrol headquarters. Nobody could tell.

But the word had got out, and the grapevine telegraph had carried it to the wise money that sets the odds on any sporting event. By eight o'clock, while the coast's biggest fight crowd was mobbing through the floodlighted gates at League Park, the downtown bookies were offering 2 to 1—sometimes 5 to 2—against Jim Hanlon. At noon that day they had posted the Dizzy Hanlon-Maxie Lyon fight at even money, but when the first rumor about G. B. got out, the odds went to 10 to 7 against Hanlon. Phone girls, bellhops, taxicab drivers, motorcops, telegraph operators—all the anonymous and sometimes unwitting units in the grapevine system—did their stuff from then on. By eight o'clock it looked certain that something had happened to Dizzy Jim's manager. By eight o'clock the wise money was willing to bet 2 to 1, or better, that Maxie Lyon would hand Jim Hanlon a pasting.

At League Park the mob roared in under the turnstile floodlights, and rumors murmured in the mob. The mob's feet pounded in the dark tunnels. The mob overflowed into grandstand and bleachers and sent noisy streams down the wooden runways into the infield, filing out into the ringside chairs. And in the full flood of the crowd, and in every straggling offshoot of it, the rumor buzzed. A band played in the rightfield bleachers. Cash customers laughed and

yelled and butchers in white jackets hawked their trays up and down the aisles. But the mob was heavy with that rumor. Here and there men fumbled at thick wallets, doing business with hip-pocket betting commissioners, hedging the money they had bet on Hanlon.

Without G. B. in Dizzy Jim Hanlon's corner, murderous Maxie Lyon was almost a cinch to win. And the rumors all said that the little manager would not be there when the bell rang.

Up in Promoter Morley's front office old Frank Tiernan, Jim's chief trainer and second, paced the bare plank floor and pestered Morley to send out one more telegram, one more phone call.

"Jeez, Morley," he said, "Jim can't go on without him—he can't, that's all!"

Morley, fat, phlegmatic—worried as hell, but not showing it—only rolled his cigar from one side of his mouth to the other.

"He's got to!" Morley said.

"But can't you get some line on him? Can't you find out where—"

"I'm doin' all I can," Morley said.

And sixty miles north of town, where the inland highway winds into a fifteen-mile stretch of steep grades at South Pass, motorcycle cops were doing a slow patrol and deputy sheriff cars were flashing their spotlights on the white fences that guarded the curves. They were looking for a smashed rail or a freshly-scarred embankment. They were looking for the wreck of a big Suiza car at the bottom of some lonely gully.

There had been a drizzle of rain in the big hills that afternoon when G. B. Murphy, Jim's manager, had started to drive down to town from the training camp at Summit Lake. G. B. was a nut and a daredevil, and he had headed for those South Pass grades in a Suiza that he hated to drive less than sixty.

"Jeez! Jim can't go on without him!" old Frank kept saying, down in Morley's office at the ball park.

And the mob went on pounding through tunnels and runways, and the band in the bleachers went on playing, while the motor lamps explored that winding stretch of concrete through the hills, looking for a dead man and the wreck of a fast car. . . .

"Jim can't go on without him," Frank Tiernan kept saying.

There was just one man in the world that could make Dizzy Jim Hanlon behave, in the ring or out of it, and that one man was G. B. Murphy. That was what old Frank had in mind, tramping up and down Morley's office, half crazy with worry. That was what the bookies had in mind, posting 5 to 2 on Maxie Lyon when they finally got the buzz, for sure, that G. B. would not show up. And that was why there was a sullen note in all the rumble and murmur and clamor of the mob in the ball park—the mob was paying for a battle, not a massacre.

The mob was paying to see Dizzy Jim Hanlon's comeback battle against the toughest light-heavy in the business, Maxie Lyon. The champ himself had been giving Maxie the runaround for eighteen months. But little G. B. Murphy, driving Jim Hanlon to the top again, had signed for Maxie Lyon on a sixty-forty split—and with a sell-out mob jamming into League Park, that contract would mean a good forty grand to the winner.

The mob was there. G. B. was missing.

Hanlon had been at the top before, but he had earned his nickname. Fighting his way up into the top ranks, the boy had been unbeatable—night after night the sports writers hustled back to their mills and wrote columns about this California package of Stanley Ketchel. But the boy was a natural-born clown. And when he got up among the big ones, he got

to clowning when he should have been training. He clowned when he ought to have been fighting. They called him "Dizzy," and he lived up to it. And after he had run through half a dozen managers and maybe a hundred grand in winnings, Dizzy Jim hit the skids and went reeling down the heights faster that he had scaled them. Then G. B. Murphy had picked him up.

Down in the dressing room that night, waiting for the bell against Maxie Lyon, Dizzy Jim played cards and tried to keep his mind off the fight—because that was a thing G. B. had made him do.

The crowd rumbled and pounded on the planking over that room, and across the corridor the preliminary boys hustled into their ring clothes, and the hangers-on-guards and callboys and loafers—all added their clamor to the noise that beat against that room from all sides. But Dizzy Jim stayed quietly there and played seven-and-a-half with "Heels" Jefferson.

"Hit me," Jim said. Heels dealt a card. "Again," Jim ordered. "I'll stand."

"You stand on five? Watch this!"

Heels—a long, lean boy, very black—showed his teeth in an ivory grin and dealt to himself.

"Beat six!"

"You win," Dizzy Jim said. He pushed a stack of pennies over. He called for his cards again, frowning, trying to keep his mind on the game, trying to keep his mind off the fight.

There were just two things G. B. had made Jim Hanlon do. First, he had made him train for every fight—for this big shot he had kept Hanlon grinding away for three weeks in that training camp at Summit Lake. Second, he had made the playboy keep quiet in the hours of waiting before a fight.

"You can play cards or you can string beads," G. B. used to tell him, "but you gotta stay quiet! If I catch you out on any more frolics, right before a fight, I'll be damned if I don't take a length of scantling to you!"

So, while the crowd rumbled in over the planking—and while the searching parties played spotlights on the South Pass highway, sixty miles to the north—Dizzy Jim stuck to the dressing room, tried to laugh off the tightening clutch of worry at his throat, and played seven-and-a-half with Heels Jefferson.

All of Jim's other managers had tried to tame the lad altogether. They had tried to make him quit skylarking in Pullmans and hotels. They had tried to steer him clear of crap games. They had tried to make him lay off putting on an act in a night club, or in the middle of a theatre crowd. They had even tried to keep him away from airports and airplanes and stunt-flyers. But G. B. had insisted on just two things—training for a fight and behaving himself while he was waiting to go on. In everything else, the sky was the limit with G. B., and G. B. was as much of a nut as Jim was.

"I wish t' hell G. B. would show up!" Jim said.

"Me too!" Heels admitted. "He sure is late!"

But a sudden grin chased the shadow of worry from Jim's face. Dizzy Jim's face had been scarred some—at twenty-six he had been seven years in the ring—but when a grin crinkled his black-browed Irish mug, it was friendly, like a boy's.

He often grinned when he thought of G. B.

"That little peewee!" Dizzy Jim said, "will I kid the pants off him when he shows up! I give him three hours' head start—him an' that Suiza—an' he said he was gonna beat me down! Listen—even if he'd of been on time, this pilot that flew me down in that little white Mercury would of beat him! You know how fast we flew down from Summit? We—"

Heels flicked another card.

"You an' him're both crazy," he said. "Him driving automobiles, an' you flyin' in airoplanes. You're both nuts!"

Dizzy Jim forgot his worry for the moment and went on chuckling.

G. B. Murphy was as wild a wild Irishman at fifty as Dizzy Jim Hanlon was at twenty-six. If Dizzy Jim borrowed the bass drum at an Elks' parade, G. B. was as likely as not to borrow a trombone and join up with him. If Dizzy Jim put on a mustache and a monocle to throw a party at a night club, the chances were that G. B. would show up in a Santa Claus beard and a high hat and a pair of hip boots. If the cops had to escort Dizzy Jim out of a theatre, they would very likely have to go back and throw G. B. out, too. And where Jim got a kick out of speed in the air, G. B. matched it by stepping his big old Suiza up to a smoking seventy on every open stretch of concrete.

The two of them, somehow, had been made to order for each other—and G. B. Murphy, matching or trumping every fool stunt of Hanlon's outside the ring, was all business when it came to putting Dizzy Jim Hanlon over the hurdles for a fight. The two of them clicked. Jim went smashing his way back up toward the top. And G. B. made him like it.

"Both these gents are crazy," a notable sports expert once wrote, "and maybe that explains why they are so crazy about each other."

Dizzy Jim tried to get his mind back on playing his cards.

"G. B. will show up," he told Heels. "He might be late, but if that peewee tells you he'll do something, he'll do it—all hell won't stop him. That's the kind of a little peewee he is!"

Heels dealt another card and called seven and a half.

Then suddenly, in the corridor outside, there came a new stir and bustle of noise. The crowd was still pounding the grandstand floor overhead, but the first pair of prelim boys was getting ready to go out. Dizzy Jim knew what that commotion in the corridor meant. Heels knew it.

"There they go!" the black boy said.

For half a second the grin left the fighter's face. He looked over at the lanky black rubber and swallowed hard.

"Jeez," he said, "I wish G. B. would make it snappy!"

"Me too!" said Heels.

But at that moment, out front in Morley's office, old Frank Tiernan was looking at a telegram—looking at it through a mist and trying to hold it steady enough to read every word it said. The telegram told what the cops and deputies and their lamps and spotlights had found, off there in the black foothills, sixty miles to the north.

Call off the show? Rush in a substitute, and offer the crowd its money back if the sub didn't make a showing?

"I could get K. O. Langford," Morley said. "He's ready to go, any time, and Werner wants to get him a shot at Lyon."

The fat promoter was looking stolidly at the floor, grinding a cigar stub slowly, around and around, under his heel.

Frank Tiernan laid the telegram down on Morley's desk—laid it there carefully, his hand trembling, as if the yellow sheet of paper weighed ten pounds.

"No," he said. He looked down at the telegram. He rubbed the mist out of his eyes and looked again.

"No," he said.

G. B. had a widow, now, and one young daughter, somewhere in the east. Frank knew that the wild little Irishman had left them none too well provided for. G. B. had pulled Dizzy Jim Hanlon out of the gutter, so to speak, but old Frank knew that Jim had been a meal ticket for G. B. when G. B. needed one. Now G. B.'s people

would need their share of Jim's purse. If Jim could only somehow drag down the winner's end. . . .

There'd be a difference, Frank figured, of maybe twelve or fifteen grand between the winner's cut and the loser's.

"No!" Old Frank said it a third time, looked vaguely around the bare wooden back of the ticket office, and again put his bony fists to his eyes.

Morley shrugged his big shoulders.

"If you think you can handle Jim Hanlon," he began.

Tiernan dug his knuckles viciously at the tears in his eyes, then drew his hands slowly down over his face. He might have been trying to rub out every seam and line that would give away the secret of what he knew. He looked at Morley, and when he spoke he said every word very carefully, like a man watching himself and speaking by the book.

"If G. B. was here," old Frank said, "he would want us to go on no matter what happened. So," Frank said, "we'll go on."

Morley got up.

"What will you tell Hanlon?" he asked.

"We'll 'tell him nothing!" Tiernan said. "We'll tell nobody nothing! We'll go on like—like— We'll go on!" he said.

The old trainer's voice was fierce, but he spoke softly. He went out quietly, too, and closed the door carefully behind him.

DOWN in Jim Hanlon's dressing room the card game stopped abruptly when the old trainer knocked and entered. The fighter jumped up from his stool by the rubbing table.

"Where's—"

Jim was wearing his sweat-shirt and tights and a heavy black sweater. His black hair was tousled. His white-taped left hand gripped the pack of cards. He stared at old Frank Tiernan, questioning.

"Where's G. B.?" he asked.

The trainer smiled suddenly. His face was gray, and the lines in it were deep, but he made himself smile.

"G. B.'s coming!" he said, and he made his voice sound right. Tiernan had guts.

But when he saw the swift, crazy spasm of relief on Hanlon's face—when he saw, in that one flash, how near Dizzy Jim had been to cracking—Tiernan swayed a little on his feet. He slammed the dressing-room door behind him, hard. The slam of the door braced him a bit.

"He's—G. B.'s on his way," Frank Tiernan said. "He'll be late," he said, "but he's gonna get here!"

Dizzy Jim looked at him.

"Sure," he said, "he'll get here! I knew he would!"

Then the old grin crinkled Hanlon's battered face. He laughed out loud. He hunched his shoulders, limbering up.

He laughed again.

"That little peewee!" he said. "He'll come draggin' in, four hours late. . . . I'll make him like it, now, when I tell him that Suiza is nothin' but a can full o' junk on wheels!"

Frank Tiernan winced a little when Hanlon began kidding about junk. He kept smiling, but his lips were tight.

"We better get going," he said. "Th' third bout's on now—only two more spots before we get th' call!"

But Jim Hanlon lagged, getting ready for his last rub and his ring clothes. He kidded and fooled. He scuffled Heels Jefferson around the room. Even on the table, with Heels giving him a light going-over, Jim kept squirming and kicking, laughing, punching at Heels. He claimed that Heels was tickling him.

There had been only one man in the world who could make Dizzy Jim behave, and that one man. . . .

Tiernan had to leave the room abruptly, once, because a lump got stuck in his throat and his eyes filled up, and he had to go outside where Jim wouldn't see him.

When he got back, Jim was trying to rig a water bucket up over the dressing-room door. There was a nail in the casing, where somebody had hung a horseshoe, and it was Jim's notion that a bucket of water hung there would be nicely tilted the next time the door opened. A couple of quarts of cold water down the back of G. B.'s neck was Dizzy Jim's idea of a greeting.

"Listen—come on!" Jim begged. "Half a bucket o' water won't do that little peewee no harm, an' if he gets sore we'll tell him we never meant it f'r him—we'll claim we was layin' f'r the call-boy!"

Tiernan tried to get hard-boiled.

"Lay down!" he said. "You're supposed t' lay quiet till it's time t' go on! G. B.'ll raise hell if—"

But Dizzy Jim was off.

Everything was right, now, according to him. He'd been worried and afraid when the hours had gone by without a sign of G. B. He'd been close to panic, even if he hadn't realized it. And Tiernan could see that the boy was half drunk with relief, now that everything was all right—now that he was sure that G. B. would show up.

"I been layin' quiet ever since I hit town," Jim said. "Come on—let's give the little peewee a good horsing! Why be an old woman, Frank!"

"Nix!" Tiernan said. "Nix!"

Outside, the crowd was yelling and pounding. The fourth bout was over and the semiwindup was beginning. And old Frank Tiernan suddenly got panicky—cold with fear—not only afraid, but afraid that he would show Jim he was afraid. He had to go through with the fight. He wanted that winner's end. . . .

The yelling and pounding suddenly swelled into a fierce uproar, and a rain of grit and sawdust sifted down into the dressing room from the hammering of hundreds of stamping feet on the planking overhead. The semifinal was getting hot. . . .

And Dizzy Jim was hog-wild again, laughing and fooling. Maxie Lyon would kick the ears off any boy that went in there with the idea of playing around.

Jim was off the rubbing table, grinning into Tiernan's face, yelling some fool argument at him and trying to make him hear it above the sudden uproar from the mob. The old trainer pushed at him, pawed at him, tried to shove him back.

"We gotta win this!" he yelled. "We gotta win this on account of—"

For one crazy second, old Frank almost gave the show away. He almost told Jim. He almost said, "On account of poor old G. B!"

Frank Tiernan desperately wanted to say some prayers. Prayers might do some good, and prayers would be respectful, too—he wanted something that would work both ways. Prayers were all he could think of, but old Frank's mother had been gone thirty years or more, and he couldn't remember any prayers.

He pushed at Jim and swore at him—and Jim stopped short in the middle of all the uproar and stared at him, the battered grin fading from his face.

"What th' hell!" Jim yelled, surprised.

Old Frank took out his bandanna and mopped at the tears that had come suddenly without his knowing it.

Somebody hammered at the door.

Dizzy Jim stiffened suddenly and for the tenth part of a second stood quiet, listening. Frank Tiernan whirled about to look at that door. Heels Jefferson looked at it.

The door opened. . . .

It was only a call boy.

"Main event coming up!" he sang out. "Dixie Wilkins wins the semi in round two by a knockout! Main event coming up!"

The call boy shut the door.

"Jeez!" Jim said, "an' G. B. ain't here yet!"

The three stood looking at each other for one stupid instant. Then old Frank Tienan snapped out of it and took hold.

"Say, it'll knock him f'r a gool—" Dizzy Jim began.

Heels Jefferson was hauling off the sweat-clothes, and Hanlon suddenly began to laugh.

"It'll knock G. B. f'r a gool," he said, "when he shows up an' sees th' parade has already begun! Boy! Will I give that Maxie Lyon a clawing before G. B. gets here! You watch me!"

Dizzy Jim chattered and kidded while he got rid of his wraps, pulled on his black ring trunks and fumbled with taped hands at the buckle of the scarlet belt he always wore. He grabbed his red bathrobe, threw it around his shoulders, and gave Heels a playful push in the chest.

"All right, Speedy," Jim said, "we're all set!"

Tiernan tried to hold him up a bit, slow him down.

"Let's wait a couple minutes," he argued. "Don't y' wanta wait a couple minutes? Maybe G. B.—"

But Dizzy Jim kept on laughing.

"Sure, he'll be here!" he said. "But, boy, I'm gonna get going before he shows, see! Watch me make Maxie Lyon call me uncle! Here goes th' Lyon-tamer!" Jim said.

Something tightened at old Frank Tiernan's throat. He knew that the jig was up—Jim Hanlon had gone dizzy again. G. B.'s people would cut only the loser's end of G. B.'s last purse.

He wanted to cry, and he wanted to swear, and he wished he could pray.

Dizzy Jim led the way out.

THEY pushed past Dixie Wilkins and his handlers in the corridor outside. They pushed through the hangers-on and the cops and the ushers. They moved out into the lighted runway and the night air and the roar of the mob. The band was playing. Every light in the park was on, and the arcs over the ring were fierce and white. White faces turned from the dark stir and uproar of the crowd, stared at the runway. Voices sang out to them. Dizzy Jim Hanlon pushed on ahead, and old Frank followed.

The crowd's clamor swelled suddenly, drowning out the blare of the band's music, and Frank knew that Maxie Lyon and his handlers had come out of the tunnel and were marching down the runway behind him. The crowd roared at Jim, and the crowd roared at Maxie Lyon—Maxie, the Man-Killer.

In the ring, when Jim Hanlon shuffled in the resin, mitted the crowd and came prancing back to his corner, laughing, a certain heavy rumble and murmur began to spread through the park. Tiernan heard it and knew what it meant. Even Heels Jefferson heard and felt it, and shivered at it.

But Jim Hanlon kept on laughing.

"F'r God's sake," Tiernan said, when he and Heels were lacing on the gloves, "keep y'r hands up when y' go out, Jim! Nix on this monkey business!"

Jim waved to somebody at the ringside.

"Listen!" Tiernan pushed at him roughly. "I'm tellin' you what G. B. would be tellin' you about them hands! Hear me?"

"Listen—I'll smack the Maxie f'r a gool, no matter where my hands are!" Jim said. "Watch me have some fun with him before G. B. gets here! I'll tear his can off!"

And while Dizzy Jim Hanlon laughed and kidded, that murmur spread out through the crowd and grew sullen. Now all the mob knew that G. B. Murphy hadn't come into the ring with Hanlon—knew that the bookies had been right, that something queer had happened, that G. B. had given his dizzy playboy a standup. And the boys who'd been betting

Dizzy to win, figuring him for a bigger Stanley Ketchel with that smart, wild little Irishman in his corner, knew now that they had their money on a grinning clown that would come out slapping and cuffing, wide open for Maxie Lyon's deadly counter-punching. The mob's murmur had the edge of a snarl in it.

"Jim! Jim!" Tiernan begged. "Listen—keep them hands up when y' go out! Hear me?"

But Dizzy Jim Hanlon was still laughing when the announcer introduced him. Half the crowd booed. He was still grinning—grinning into the saturnine scowl on Maxie Lyon's face—when they went out for the referee's instructions. He grinned when he turned back to his corner and limbered up for the bell.

Tiernan crawled from under the ropes, and Morley, the promoter, grabbed him and yelled at him.

"Any chance?"

Morley's mouth framed the words, but the howl of the mob drowned him out. Old Frank made a hopeless gesture at him and shook his head.

The bell clanged.

Dizzy Jim marched out at a quick, jerky walk, his hands dangling at his sides. Maxie Lyon—blond, close-coupled, powerful—shuffled at him fast, dug a left to the body.

Jim threw his right in a swing from the hips. He cuffed the blond boy with his left, swung his right again—then closed in like a whirlwind, both hands swinging. Maxie tied him up and wrestled him away from the center of the ring.

Dizzy Jim clowned his way out of the clinch, and the crowd hooted. Jim threw a right that caught Lyon high on the head. Lyon closed in with his hands pumping. He hustled Hanlon halfway across the ring—Hanlon wide open and swinging fiercely with both hands—and dug his heavy, short punches at Dizzy Jim's midriff. They hit the ropes together, rallied in a bitter scuffle there, and clinched.

The referee broke them. Dizzy Jim stepped around him and came in again fast, raking at the other boy with long lefts and rights.

But Lyon, covering and punching short, took charge then. Dizzy Jim laughed as he back-pedaled, still swinging, but Maxie Lyon hurt him as he punched him back across the ring in a sudden fierce rush. Down in Dizzy Jim's corner old Frank Tiernan groaned and swore.

"The damn clown!" he said.

The bell rang, and the crowd booed Hanlon when he rallied after the bell and cuffed at Maxie Lyon, laughed, and tried to touch gloves with him.

"Nix on that!"

Old Frank yelled into Jim's ear when he got him on the stool. He cursed him out.

"Nix on that, you damn dizzy halfwit!" he yelled. "You're blowing this—y' hear me! Keep them hands up! Y' gotta fight that monkey!"

But Dizzy Jim ran out for the second with his hands swinging again. He fired another wild right at long range, missed, laughed, and got a Bronx cheer from the crowd.

Jim started slugging, and for ten seconds he bore down, tried hard, waded in. But he was off on the wrong foot; he'd set a sloppy, loose-jointed, happy-go-lucky pace, and when he wanted to place his punches, it didn't work. He swung bitterly—but Maxie Lyon blocked, countered, and then, when he saw the spot, stepped in with a barrage to the belly that would have torn an ordinary man in two.

Dizzy Jim had to break ground, but he threw gloves while he broke. Maxie measured him, bored in—and suddenly, on the ropes, he shifted and rocked Hanlon back on his heels with a hook to the jaw. Jim wrestled out of the clinch while the crowd howled. He raked and clawed at the stocky blond.

But Maxie Lyon was fighting his own fight, and when Hanlon came at

him like a whirling dervish, Maxie blocked, slipped, set himself and planted solid punches. The round ended with Dizzy Jim staggering back, hammering and battering as he staggered, while Maxie Lyon shuffled in swiftly, measuring him. . . .

The bell rang. Even from the bleacher seats the customers could see that Jim was hurt—that his grin was a bluff, and that his legs trembled when he walked to his corner.

Tiernan and the black boy worked frantically after that second round. Old Frank yelled at Jim, called him names. But even in the middle of the beating Maxie was handing him, Dizzy Jim jabbered and laughed and shoved at his handlers and told them that the next round would be different.

He was wrong.

"Keep them hands up!" Tiernan yelled.

And the bell rang.

With a crazy grin on his face, Jim went out for the third, and he went wide open and swinging his fists low.

Maxie Lyon slid out to meet him, caught him at the echo of the bell, hooked his short left and smashed his right hand to the jaw. Hanlon swung twice, wild. He stumbled, pawed at the other man—and Lyon bobbed up from under the aimless clubbing, straightened suddenly and crashed his right hand high to Jim's temple.

Dizzy Jim Hanlon's lips were still writhed in a foolish grin. His head snapped back. He stared up for an instant into the blinding white lamps over the ring.

If it hadn't been for the three weeks' conditioning G. B. had put him through, Jim's comeback trail would have ended there.

He was floundering on the canvas, blinded by the lights, deafened by the mob's blood-yell, when the referee got to "Five."

At "Six," he was on his knees.

Maxie Lyon came out fast from his neutral corner—and Dizzy Jim, stumbling up from the canvas, threw both fists. Lyon came in bobbing and weaving, but Hanlon lifted a punch from his ankles to straighten him out. He swung a clubbing overhand left. He smashed and battered, whaling away in a blind fury. For half a second, Lyon got inside, planted two to the midriff, then shifted his left in a murderous hook to Hanlon's head.

That left missed—and then, suddenly, in the midst of his berserk slugging and swinging, Dizzy Jim laughed. He laughed like a lunatic. He jumped and clubbed and swung. There were hoots and howls in the uproar from the mob. . . .

The bell rang.

The referee had to grab Jim Hanlon and steer him to his corner.

"How d' y' like it?" Tiernan shouted at him. He tousled his head fiercely and jammed the salts at his nostrils. "You asked f'r it—now go get it!"

The old trainer yelled and called names. The roar of the mob drowned him out, and the grin on Dizzy Jim's face was vacant, stupid. Tiernan cursed at him, taunted him, dared him to make a fight of it.

But down deep inside him, old Frank Tiernan knew what had happened, knew that yelling was no use.

Jim Hanlon had held himself in and behaved himself, waiting for G. B. all those long hours before the fight. He had waited and been afraid, and he had held himself in. Then when Tiernan had told him G. B. was coming—that G. B. was coming, sure—the sheer, crazy relief of it had gone to the boy's head.

"Go on out and take it some more!" Tiernan yelled. "Keep y'r damn hands in y'r pockets if y' want to!"

G. B. had always made Jim go out with his hands up, cocked and ready to punch, the free swing of the shoulders behind everything he shot. G. B. had given him a cagy defense and a

smashing, close-coupled, place-punching offensive. But now Dizzy Jim had gone dizzy again.

Tiernan knew why—knew that it was his fault—knew that, trying to keep Jim steady, he had lied to him and erased his worries and made him drunk and reckless with relief.

"Go on out, you—"

The bell clanged for the fourth.

Dizzy Jim went out like a tipsy stevedore going to battle in an alley—wide open, swinging his gloves and grinning.

He met Maxie Lyon with a wild fusillade, but Lyon went to work. He waded into the storm of punches, blocked them, slipped them, shook them off and went to work. He broke ground under Jim's dizzy rush, but belted steadily to the body as he slid back. Jim's wild swing cut a gash on Maxie's right cheek, but the blond boy hammered at Jim's belly with short, heavy, jolting punches. He clipped a short left to the jaw, staggered the clawing bearcat, went back to work on his middle. He came off the ropes with a right-hand smash to the mouth that would have stopped any sane man. Dizzy Jim reeled, but came tearing back in. Maxie broke back to the ropes again, slid under Jim's frantic left, then stepped in close with another barrage to the midriff.

The big ball park was a madhouse of noise. The killer's yell was in the mob's throat, and that yell grew shrill as the mob saw Jim Hanlon fading. It saw Jim Hanlon fading, saw his punches going wild, saw murderous Maxie Lyon grin sardonically as he moved in to cut Jim Hanlon down.

The blond boy came plugging out from the ropes, fought Hanlon to the center of the ring, then shifted suddenly in his rush. He feinted his right, feinted his left, then smashed the right home solidly over the heart. He shifted smoothly and in his stride—shifted like a first-rate fighting man—shifted the way G. B. had taught Jim Hanlon to shift. That right banged Hanlon's body with a thud they heard in the rightfield bleachers.

Jim Hanlon stumbled. His left swept over Maxie Lyon's head in an aimless arc. Lyon hooked his left to the jaw. He hooked his right when Hanlon faltered.

Hanlon went down.

Maxie Lyon turned his back, and Hanlon got to his knees, shook his head and tried to push himself to his feet.

Hanlon got up.

He stood swaying as Lyon came sliding in. He threw both hands at the blond boy—threw them again.

Lyon stepped inside. He measured with his left, timed the right and clipped it in, short and hard. Dizzy Jim Hanlon fell forward to his hands and knees, pushed at the canvas, then sprawled forward.

The referee began another count.

Hanlon was up at "Seven."

Twice more Maxie Lyon beat Hanlon to the canvas, but each time Hanlon got up. Out in the roaring crowd, customers were yelling, "Stop it!" when Maxie moved in for the third time. But this time the stocky blond killer battered at Hanlon's middle with a flurry of hard jolts, tried to drive him back toward the ropes and set him up for a final smash. For a wild ten seconds Dizzy Jim would not break ground, would not give way—stood in mid-ring, throwing everything he had left.

Dizzy Jim Hanlon had guts, too.

Maxie Lyon, battling that last feeble spurt of desperation, took a chance. He swung wild with his right, threw all he had into it, and caught Hanlon high on the head.

Hanlon went down again in a crazy sprawl, got to his hands and knees again. . . .

Glassy-eyed and gasping, he tried to get up. He could not. . . . He wavered.

And then—no longer able to get to his feet, no longer able to swing

a punch—Dizzy Jim Hanlon started to crawl along the canvas. Some smear of his dizzy grin was still left on his face. He would not crawl away from the blond boy with the dynamite fists. He started to crawl toward him.

The bell rang!

"WHERE'S G. B.?"

When Tiernan got the boy back to his corner—got him doused with water, jammed the salts to his nose, painted his raw lips with collodion—that was Dizzy Jim's question.

"Where's G. B.?" he asked. "Ain't it about time—"

Now when he was licked and punch-drunk from the hammering fists that had shown him up for a clown, Dizzy Jim wanted that wild little Irishman, that little peewee.

Heels and old Frank Tiernan worked over him like madmen.

Jim turned his head heavily and looked off up the aisle back of his corner. Frank Tiernan turned and looked then. Heels Jefferson looked. The League Park lights were on between the rounds, and the mob was milling and howling in the jammed seats. The long aisle was empty.

Dizzy Jim Hanlon sighed with a sobbing catch in his breath, turned his face back to the ring, and leaned forward a little on the stool. He said a queer thing.

"Thank God!" Jim Hanlon said.

The bell banged for the fifth.

"Keep them hands—"

Tiernan never finished.

Jim went out with his hands up, cocked and ready to punch. He went out heavily, a bit unsteady, but he went out with his hands up, his eyes on Maxie Lyon, and no grin on his face.

Lyon moved in savagely, half crouched against Hanlon's next flurry of wild swings. And when the swings did not come, he whirled in suddenly against Hanlon's guard, battering at his arms with short hooks, and aiming that vicious left of his at Hanlon's chin. He did not reach it.

Jim Hanlon was fighting a new fight. Something had happened. . . .

In the middle of the white ring, while the mob sent up a vast roar that had a gasp in it, Dizzy Jim Hanlon stood like a rock while Maxie Lyon crowded in to hammer at him with everything he had.

Hanlon crouched and blocked and covered. He staggered a bit at the onslaught—he was weak—but he crouched, blocked, covered, while Maxie Lyon punched. Once Hanlon threw his left, short and savage, with a swing of the shoulders behind it. It opened the cut on Maxie's right cheek, started the blood again, and Maxie sagged for a split second. The mob's yell had a shrill edge to it, and Maxie's counter was wild.

Lyon began moving in and out, moving around Jim, place-hitting and stepping away. He outspeeded Hanlon. He worked him over. He hit and hurt. But Jim Hanlon stuck bitterly there in the center of the ring, blocking what he could, firing back when he saw a chance.

The bell banged at last.

"Gimme th' salts again," Jim said, back in his corner.

Frank Tiernan tried to yell at him, tried to get something over to him above the crazy howl of the crowd, but Jim waved him off.

"Shut up, Frank!" he said.

Tiernan and the black boy gave him a fast rub. They wet him down again, loosened his trunks, helped him breathe.

Jim Hanlon lay back against the corner of the ropes. He listened. He nodded his head.

The bell rang. . . . Round six.

Hanlon went out with his hands up again. It was Maxie Lyon, this time, who crowded in with a swinging rush. It was Jim Hanlon who covered, stepped away, crouched under the swinging and countered with short punches.

Lyon stepped around him again. He lunged in, hammered at Jim's guard, drove a sudden fury of swinging punches at Hanlon's midriff, and tried fiercely to set him back for a crack on the jaw. Hanlon was still tired and he had to give way. He broke back slowly, though, his guard up. And when Maxie Lyon pressed him too furiously, he shot his jolting left. He shot it again. He shot it again.

Three times in that one sudden rush Maxie Lyon's head bobbed back. It was Maxie Lyon who broke away from that rally and covered.

He came out at the crazy clamor of the crowd's yell—came out of his cover and went ripping in viciously. He drove Hanlon to the ropes. Hanlon tied him up, too tired to hold him, and Lyon smashed another punch to Hanlon's face. Jim dove off the ropes into a clinch, and Maxie half threw him off his feet as he wrestled to be free.

The crowd booed and howled. Hanlon met Maxie's rush with a jolting left, but Maxie beat him back again toward the ropes. Hanlon was covering, boxing carefully, building up some of the strength that Maxie Lyon had hammered out of him in the first four rounds.

The bell clanged to end the sixth.

Frank Tiernan was babbling and crying—the wildest of the thirty thousand fight-mad humans in that ball park—when Dizzy Jim got back to the corner, but Jim pushed at him, waved him away.

Tiernan and the long black boy worked at Jim's legs. They rubbed him down. Tiernan blubbered and yelled.

"Shut up, Frank!" Jim said.

Heels gave one arm a swift massage. Tiernan took the other. They held up the salts.

"Don't need 'em," Jim said. He turned his head away.

Jim nodded quickly. He nodded again, listening.

The bell banged. . . . Round seven!

Jim Hanlon half turned back as he left his corner, and the shadow of a smile flicked at his battered face and was gone.

The crowd's fierce clamor went swirling up into the night sky, and Dizzy Jim shuffled smoothly in to meet Maxie Lyon's charge in mid-ring. This time it was Maxie Lyon who threw caution to the winds and went in swinging, charging, throwing gloves. And Dizzy Jim, crouched with his hands held high, no longer blocked and countered and covered. He met the onslaught, stepped smoothly into it, and matched the blond boy's wild assault with a white, relentless fury of his own.

Hanlon's legs buckled when a looping right smashed his guard down, but he was inside it in a flash. His left was a plugging jolt. His right hook ripped through with a deadening thud.

Maxie Lyon went down.

Out in the half-dark of the ball park the mob was on its feet, and the big shell of steel and planking was a screaming maelstrom. The mob was standing on the seats. Hats, cushions, papers, flickered up at the lights.

Lyon got to his knees, shook his head. He was not through. He got up.

In a sudden fright and ferocity, he swarmed in, beat at Dizzy Jim Hanlon with murderous fists and hustled him back for an instant. Jim kept his head. White, intent—desperate to place every ounce he had saved for his final attack—Hanlon crouched again, took a hammering high on the head and pumped both hands to the body. He shifted behind those punches, throwing his weight into them. The blond boy's wild right hand banged at his jaw. Hanlon staggered. He measured his man with a flicking left, then crossed the right again. Maxie Lyon stumbled forward and went down.

Hanlon tried for a neutral corner, moving with unsteady legs. He had

nearly spent what he had left. There was not much more. If Lyon got up. . . .

Lyon did get up.

He got up slowly, bitterly, but he got up. . . .

Dizzy Jim closed with him, tied him up and staggered with him to the ropes. Dizzy Jim was almost gone, almost spent, but he stared over the blond boy's shoulder toward his own corner. His tired eyes were straining, searching.

Old Frank Tiernan stood back of the post, raised his hands, signaled him, gave him the office. But Jim Hanlon did not look at Tiernan at all. He nodded, tried to grin, but he did not look at Tiernan, did not see Tiernan.

Hanlon stabbed his man suddenly out of the clinch, stabbed him away when he tried to stumble into a swinging rush, and stepped in suddenly when Maxie Lyon faltered. Jim Hanlon uppercut—not a swing, this time, but a short, murderous, blasting punch. Lyon's head jerked back. He stared up into the blind white of the arcs. Jim Hanlon cracked his right hand on the point of Maxie Lyon's jaw.

Lyon crumpled at the middle, bent forward suddenly and bowed like a jointless clown. He dove at the canvas. He fell face forward. He sprawled on the canvas, twitched a little. . . .

Dizzy Jim Hanlon found a corner, braced himself there until the count was over, but when he tried to move out and help Maxie Lyon back to his chair, he stumbled.

Kneeling on the canvas while the referee struggled to raise his right mitt, Dizzy Jim looked over at his corner and tried to grin at the gray little man he saw there.

They got him out of the milling mob, at last, got him away from the mob and the lights and the blare of sound gone insane. They got him back to the dressing room, rubbed some life back into him, worked over him for an hour. And then they tried to break it to him that G. B. was gone—that he'd been killed that afternoon, racing the Suiza down the slippery grades from the training camp at Summit Lake.

But for a long time Dizzy Jim would not believe them. He laughed.

"If G. B. crashed this afternoon," Jim asked them, "who was that little peewee in my corner tonight, from the end of the fourth round on?"

JAMES W. EGAN knows boxing inside out, which is one reason why his story

PALOOKA TAMER

in the next issue wins a place with the fine fight yarns appearing in ACE-HIGH

WESTERN CLOSE-UPS AND FADE-OUTS

By Frederic Norris

14. SHOTGUN MESSENGERS

DEADWOOD DICK, express rider, bandit killer and Indian Nemesis—the hero of countless tales of the Wild West in its wildest days—never existed in the flesh. And yet hundreds of hard-riding, hard-shooting hombres have a just claim to the title—and what goes with it. For it was a monicker applied loosely to any armed guard who rode the stage coaches—particularly the gold coaches—that wheeled over the Western trails.

Deadwood merely marked the center of activities for the stage gang, located as it was in the heart of the Black Hills gold country. It was the junction point of four noted trails: the Bismarck, the Fort Pierce, the Sidney and Black Hills, and the famous Cheyenne Trail, a 300-mile stretch and the oldest of the four coach routes.

Both the Cheyenne and Sidney trails soon came to be the favorite stamping grounds of the road agents. Here the notorious Bass gang cut in on the gold shipments rolling out of Deadwood and grew fat on the profits of their hauls. But the other trails also received considerable attention from the stick-up fraternity. And along the bleak stretches of all four routes, scores of bandits and guards were shot to death in a never-ending war for the possession of the precious yellow cargoes.

In the beginning, passenger coaches carried the gold dust in express boxes, but the increase in output boosted the values of shipments to hundreds of thousands of dollars and it was then that the "gold coaches" were installed. They were the forerunner of the armored cars of today, the original Deadwood gold coach (Old Ironsides) being lined with boiler-plate and loopholed for gunplay in the event of a hold-up. As a rule, two shotgun messengers rode these treasure wagons, either as mounted escort or perched atop the box. However, when Old Ironsides hit the trail with its chests loaded with bullion, eight men accompanied it—two riders ahead, two in the rear and four inside, all armed to the teeth. No passengers were allowed on the outbound gold coaches, although this rule was broken occasionally as a special favor to some individual known to the company.

The armed guard, or shotgun messenger, was a grim product of the Old West. His was a tough job. While the driver got his rest at the end of the regular relay (about 100 miles), the messenger rode 500 and 600 miles, day and night, without leaving his seat except for his meals and an occasional stretching of legs at the company's stations. He faced all the privations of the trail on those murderous relays, and he carried on through rain and sleet, blazing sun and freezing cold, with death constantly at his elbow—for $62.50 per month and his board! And—believe it or not—there were plenty of candidates for the job!

Guns, of course, were the only safety insurance carried by the messengers in their bloody war with the road agents. Winchesters and Colts were used on the first runs, but these were finally discarded in favor of the sawed-off shotgun, probably the deadliest weapon of all in close quarters, as our modern gangsters—and police—have found out. Usually the messenger rode up on the seat beside the driver, his double-barreled gun across his knees. Under him, in the "front box" beneath the seat, was the treasure chest of oak or steel, crammed with buckskin sacks of nuggets, dust, or neat stacks of bullion bars.

As much as a quarter of a million dollars in gold was sent out over the perilous Sidney trail—275 miles of bandit-infested territory—often with only four men standing between the outlaw gangs and the golden treasure! It was a bloody, hard-bitten trail—dangerous night or day—with Deadwood, a badman's paradise, at one end and Sidney, a wide open, gun-roaring helldorado at the other. Sidney, at that time only a wide spot in the road, boasted eighty-eight saloons. . . . just to give you an idea.

Sticking up coaches was the principal business of the hard boys in the Black Hills neighborhood, and it was a deadly business with no quarter asked—or given. No stereotyped "Hands up!" signalized the beginning of a battle between the road agents and the shotgun messengers. The boys said it with bullets. Naturally, the guard shot first—if he could—but luck was not always with him. Often a hurricane attack tumbled him in a bullet-riddled heap. In that event, the driver was usually killed along with him, the horses cut loose from the traces, the express box wrecked, and the loot split on the spot. Between the two factions there soon sprang up a deep and undying hatred—a feud eternal. On one side, there was the standing order "Get the guard!" In the bloody scrimmages along the gold coach trails that order spelled *war*—war to the death!

Sam Bass was probably the best known bandit who terrorized the Black Hills country. But there were others—Bob Costello, Dutch Blackburn, Johnny Wall, Frank Towle, the notorious "Lame Johnny," "Persimmons Bill," Jim Barry and Joel Collins . . . to name only a few. Stacked up against them were some of the finest and bravest men on the Western frontier. Scores of these gun-slinging messengers went down fighting, unknown and unsung, yet some names have found their way into the official records. And among that grim-faced, reckless crowd, here are some whose performance upheld all the glorious traditions of the fighting men who rode the box: Billy Dobson, of the Shasta Line; Clark Stocking, badman Nemesis from Wyoming; Charley Parks; Jimmie Brown; John Fetherstun; John X. Biedler, better known as "X"; Boone May; Scott Davis; Johnny Slaughter; Gene Barnett and Gail Hill.

Beating the bandits at their own game was a tough assignment. For that reason the ingenious method devised by Senator William Stewart of Nevada deserves a paragraph in this story. It seems that the outlaws were running wild in the Death Valley sector, slaughtering the guards and literally "getting away with murder"—not to mention the bullion shipments. Senator Stewart's big silver consignments were going the way of the rest when he hit upon the idea of running his bullion into solid balls, weighing 800 pounds each. These were loaded into an open freight wagon, five balls to the load, and sent without escort through the heart of the bandit territory. The scheme worked perfectly. Speed played an important part in the life of the outlaw gangs, and it was obviously impossible for a band of mounted men to carry 800-pound cannon balls and make a fast getaway. And so the Stewart silver shipments rolled on to their destination—untouched. Senator Stewart, however, was one of the limited few who lost no sleep while his bullion was in transit.

It was the era of "big money" for the road agents, and they were active along all of the coach trails. But they preferred strategic spots for their hold-ups, and probably the most popular of these was the Port Neuf Canyon, south of Fort Hall, Idaho, on the Virginia-Salt Lake route. This particular spot was built-to-order for the stick-up business. At the bottom of a deep canyon cut in the rock a road twisted, its turns hidden by

thick underbrush. At one point on this road a rockslide necessitated a deadly hairpin turn where the six-horse teams were forced to travel at a slow walk to avoid an upset. And here the road agents struck . . . again and again. You may have heard of Robbers' Roost. Well, this was the original Robbers' Roost, so named in 1866—and not for sentimental reasons.

Stage coach robberies were the rule, and not the exception, in the Western badlands, although one bloody stick-up in the notorious Port Neuf Canyon warrants telling again. There was never one just like it. According to the records, the Vigilantes had been mopping up the outlaw gangs in the Robbers' Roost region, and in July the trails were reported open. It was then that four citizens of Alder Gulch boarded the eastbound coach with $75,000 in gold dust hidden in their clothes and in an old gunny sack which was carefully stowed under the back seat. Before the stage dipped into the canyon—the most dangerous part of the run—two more passengers climbed in, a miner named Carpenter and a bartender from Virginia City, one Fred Brown. Charley Parks was the express messenger and Frank Williams, a husky young lad with a flaming red silk handkerchief looped around his neck, was on the driver's seat. They were scheduled to pass Robbers' Roost about two in the afternoon and, inasmuch as this was merely a passenger coach with eight armed men aboard, no daylight hold-up was anticipated.

Rounding the hairpin turn, however, the lead team shied suddenly and a voice bawled:

"Crawl out, everybody! You're covered, gents. Stick 'em up!"

And then one of the Alder Gulch men, Al Parker made a fatal move.

"Go t' hell!" he roared. "Shoot, boys!"

His right hand dropped to his holster . . . and stopped there. From the underbrush there blazed a rain of death, and Parker pitched forward. Another murderous blast of buckshot hit the coach, and Parker's three pals slumped in their seats. Carpenter lay on the floor, gasping for breath, while atop the coach Charley Parks was helpless, his left leg shattered. Fred Brown, sitting alongside the driver, leaped from the box and dived into the brush. Only he and Frank Williams, the driver, escaped the unseen murder squad.

Inside of ten minutes the stage and the bodies had given up the golden cargo, and the gang faded into the recesses of the canyon. And Frank Williams, with four dead man piled inside the stage and two wounded men sprawled on the roof, rolled on to Salt Lake.

With his nerve shattered by the slaughter, it is chronicled that Williams took a lay-off—and it was then that he was suddenly seized by the suspicious Vigilantes and sentenced to hang for being an accomplice in the Port Neuf massacre. He protested his innocence up to the last hour, but before he swung off into space his nerve crumpled and he mumbled a confession. He had sold out to the road agents, he asserted, for a divvy of the loot. The flaming red handkerchief he wore was the signal to his pals that there was "gold aboard." Two years later the last of the Robbers' Roost gang named by Williams was rounded up in California and hanged. This necktie party, incidentally, marked the end of a gigantic man-hunt that was pushed relentlessly in ten states.

However, the shotgun messenger era was on its last lap. In 1886 the first railroad penetrated the Black Hills. With the coming of the Iron Horse, the Deadwood coach and the multitude of Deadwood Dicks faded gradually from the Western scene. But they left behind them some blood-soaked records which will live forever in the hearts of the American people.

MURDER AT DEAD MAN'S RUN

By Harvey Myers

Phil Dewey was on the trail of one pretty slick murderer. There were few, if any, clues, but Dewey pushed on, senses sharp and alert. His determination was quickened with revenge. The victim of the murder had been his partner. . . .

IT was only a thin streamer of smoke snaking lazily skyward through the banks of rolling morning mists, but Phil Dewey was interested these days in everything the least bit out of the usual—even chance campfires. Somewhere in this bleak wilderness, certainly within a radius of one hundred miles, was the man who had killed old Cutter Malone, his partner.

As he pushed his canoe out into the water and headed upstream toward that gray-blue ribbon of smoke, the vision of the mutilated body of the dead man, whom he had loved like a father, lying there face down on the cabin floor, danced in an ugly red mist before his eyes. It seemed weeks since he and Corporal Stack Kilgallen had parted at the death cabin on the Little Kanayak River,

each with a set of vague clues to work on. Actually, it had been only two days ago.

Beaching his canoe, Phil made his way over a carpet of wet autumn leaves toward the strange camp. A big man was stooping over the fire. He turned, shot a startled glance at Dewey, then with a cry of mingled rage and fear caught up a stone and hurled it with all his might. Although taken completely by surprise, Phil dodged enough so as to partially evade the heavy missile. The rock struck his left shoulder at the base of the neck, sending him off balance. He stumbled, half fell. . . . The man at the fire, his greenish eyes gleaming madly, reached for another stone. But before he could lift it, Dewey hurled himself forward. The impact of his driving body threw both crashing to the ground.

Phil had dropped his rifle; at the moment it had seemed the only sensible thing to do. He regretted it now. His left arm was practically useless; even the muscles of his back were numbed from the paralyzing shock of that stone.

The man fought with all the reckless abandon of a cornered beast. Biting, scratching, gouging, slugging, they rolled over and over across the leaf-strewn open space. A yellow froth bubbled out through the man's whiskered lips. His green eyes had an insane glitter in them. Phil thrust his opponent's twitching face into the soft earth beneath his knees. The man's body was as elastic as tempered steel. He writhed and twisted, jerked aside and scrambled to his knees. But the air was sucking in and out of his lungs in great labored gasps. Dewey, despite his useless arm, was still comparatively fresh. Again and again he drove his right fist into that whiskered face. A dozen times clawlike fingers locked about his throat; fists beat savagely against his body; hob-nailed shoes kicked him.

There was little question in Phil Dewey's mind but that he was fighting a madman. He had heard ugly tales of the unnatural strength and viciousness of maniacs. Certain it was that this man was as strong as three ordinary men, and there was a murderous gleam in his beastlike eyes which was unmistakable. But never for a moment did Dewey fear for the outcome. He was just as strong as the madman and in much better condition. He twisted up on his knee, balancing himself for one last smashing blow, which he knew would put an end to the fight. There was the sound of a quick step directly behind him. He half turned. There was a throaty grunt. Then something hit him squarely on top of the head. A single darting stab of pain caught him behind the eyes. The world went black. . . .

WHEN Phil Dewey blinked his way back to consciousness, he found himself lying braced against a moss-covered boulder, his aching head supported by a folded blanket. A stranger sat cross-legged before the madman's fire, expertly broiling strips of bacon held over the flames on a great wood spit.

At first Phil could not move hand or foot. His body was one big ache. His head throbbed and hurt so that he could only keep his squinting eyes open for a few seconds at a time. There was no sign of the maniac. Apparently the stranger was a Frenchman. He was meticulously dressed in the height of northwoods fashion. He even wore a necktie, a flaming red affair knotted at the neck of a black and white checked flannel shirt. His face was lean and dark; the features small, delicately moulded. His eyes were a snaky black, fretted at the corners with tiny crow-foot wrinkles.

Phil groaned, and after several futile attempts got up on his elbow. The stranger flashed white teeth through the smoke. "Ah, the haid, she is sore, eh, my friend?"

Phil nodded glumly. "Damned right," he muttered. "What hit me? Where'd he go? Who are you?"

The stranger shrugged expressively. "I answer your last question first," he smiled. "Me, I am Andre Bergé. I trap, I hunt, I trade, I dig in the ground for gold. As to what hit you, m'sieu, I know not. I hear the sounds—one great fight. I leave my canoe and come quick. I find you on the ground with one so big bump on the haid."

Phil nodded and grimaced with the resulting pain. "You didn't see him then?"

"But *non,* m'sieu," Andre Bergé answered quietly. "What did he look like, this *loup garou?*"

Phil passed a hand across his dizzy eyes. "He was a beefy geezer," he answered, "short and stocky, with long arms, green eyes, and a brownish beard tangled so that it looked like a mouse nest. Husky devil, strong as all get out, mean as hell."

Andre Bergé's eyes squinted understandingly. "I know that one," he muttered. "Mad Joe Throgg. He sell hooch to the Indians. A bad one for sure, that Throgg."

"Cuckoo, is he?"

The Frenchman seemed not to comprehend for an instant. Then he smiled. "Ah, yes," he muttered. "You mean he is queer? Just so, m'sieu. He has what you call it—spells. Perhaps he live alone too much. I do not know. Of a surety though, Throgg is at times mad. But why should he—ah—jump you, m'sieu?"

Phil Dewey stole a sidewise glance at the Frenchman's dark face. "Jump me?" he repeated. "Oh, yeah. *He* did jump *me* at that. I thought you said you weren't on the job until it was all over? As to why he should have jumped me I can only figure one answer to it: guilty conscience."

"I do not understand," Bergé murmured politely. His quick eyes avoided Dewey's face.

"Well, my name's Dewey," Phil explained. "I've been out of the country for several months, but when I'm at home I hole up on Kanayak River, near Dead Man's Run. Me and Cutter Malone was partners in some gold prospects. When I showed up a few days ago, I found Cutter dead—murdered. And he had been robbed. It looks like this Throgg feller—"

"Murdered?" the Frenchman interrupted. "Cutter Malone—murdered?"

Phil Dewey nodded. "Just what makes you so interested, mister?" Phil came slowly to his feet, keeping a wary eye on Andre Bergé.

The Frenchman recovered himself with an apparent effort. "I come here while you are away," he explained, speaking very slowly and precisely. "I visit Cutter Malone many times. We good friends, Cutter and me. I buy one of his claims last week."

Phil Dewey's eyes never left the Frenchman's face as the latter fumbled a much-folded sheet of paper out of an inner pocket and handed it to him with fingers that trembled visibly. Phil read the scrawled words on that sheet of ruled notepaper slowly and carefully. The handwriting and signature were not his partner's, a fact which naturally aroused Dewey's suspicions. But not by so much as the twitch of an eyelash did he betray his internal reactions to the contents of that smudged sheet. It was a bill of sale for one of Cutter Malone's gold claims, supposedly signed and written by him and testified to by two witnesses. The date on the top of the paper was exactly one week old.

"And I am very much afraid," Bergé was saying, "that I may indirectly have caused your partner's death. I paid him eight thousand dollars in gold for that claim. I made no secret of the matter. I carried that gold to him openly. In fact, I may have bragged about it, because, you see, m'sieu, I dug that gold from the ground with my own hands, and I was proud. There were many who

knew of my transaction with Malone. In fact," he went on after an almost imperceptible pause, "I believe that Throgg was at my cabin that day. He —therefore, must have known. . . ."

"You think then that it was someone—Throgg maybe—who knew that you passed that gold on to Cutter who committed the murder?" Phil queried.

The Frenchman shrugged. "Who can say?" he mumbled. "All things considered though, my friend, the evidence points that way. Does it not?"

Phil Dewey scowled fiercely, nodded. "You're right as hell," he agreed. "Any idea which direction Throgg took?"

Without replying, Andre Bergé started toward the river. Limping slightly, Phil Dewey followed. The Frenchman made his way along the wooded bank of the stream. Behind a clump of red-limbed willows, perhaps one hundred yards above the spot where Phil's canoe was beached, he indicated a V-shaped cleft in the soft mud. Here a canoe had not long since thrust its nose into the sand. "He come from downstream," the Frenchman explained. "I think maybe he go away downstream too."

Phil nodded abstractedly. "Probably so," he agreed. "He won't lose me. Whether or not he killed Cutter, I'm owin' him somethin'—for this." He touched his sore head gingerly, got into the canoe, and pushed off downstream. A minute later Andre Bergé pushed off in his own canoe, heading—upstream.

The mists were slowly rising. Dewey did not once look behind him. Suddenly a rifle bullet struck the flat side of his hickory paddle and ricocheted, screeching, away. A split second later there was a muffled report.

Phil took a fresh grip on the uninjured paddle and swung the nose of the canoe at a sharp right angle toward the shore. As he scrambled out on the bank, the canoe containing Andre Bergé was just disappearing around a mist-blurred bend in the stream.

Apparently the Frenchman had not heard the shot, or if he had heard it had paid no attention.

Phil strode leisurely up the leafy bank toward the edge of a nearby thicket. The instant he reached the shelter of the close-growing spruces, his assumed nonchalance vanished. Closely following the river, he started upstream, running swiftly, eyes and ears intently alert.

When he came abreast of the big Peterborough canoe and Andre Bergé, his pace slowed. He crept stealthily through the thick underbrush, his eyes never leaving the clouded stream and the dim outline of the big canoe.

The Frenchman peered frequently over his shoulder now, as though anticipating pursuit. When finally convinced that the liquid thoroughfare at the rear was deserted, he turned across the stream toward the side on which Dewey made his way, slipped expertly into the mouth of a wooded inlet, and disappeared.

With infinite caution, Dewey approached that inlet. Before he had gone fifty paces, the sound of angry voices came to him. Crawling on hands and knees through a dense clump of limber-limbed willows, he came face to face with Andre Bergé —and Mad Joe Throgg!

". . . fool," the Frenchman was saying. "It was not enough that you should in the first place attack him without provocation. No, you must try to shoot him in the back. You, who cannot hit a bull moose at twenty yards. And with me to take the blame. For of course he thinks that *I* fired that shot. I am about through with you, Throgg. Never have you served me well. Always do you blunder. You—"

"But I tell you, chief, I had one of my spells," Throgg protested, his green eyes twitching. "At that, he damned near killed me. If you hadn't

butted in when you did, he would have got me sure. And I tried to plug him—later—of course. It was him or me. He's a smart one, that Dewey. You can't kid him out of the way like you done with that young redcoat, Kilgallen. Dewey never would have forgotten me. He would have followed me up—and—and—sometime—he would have finished me. I know. I . . ."

But Bergé, with a disgusted shrug of his shoulders, had turned away. Dropping on his knee, he pawed the leaves from beneath a big gray boulder and lifted out a small, metal-bound keg. Two other kegs followed that first one. "Here are thirty gallons of good whiskey," he said. "You will cut it to sixty gallons. At least you know enough to do that. You know where to deliver it. Be careful if the Indians offer you furs in payment. Insist on gold wherever possible."

Phil crept farther back into the brush tangle as the two men loaded the kegs into Throgg's canoe. Under other circumstances he would have taken it upon himself to destroy that whiskey. Bergé was apparently financing Throgg in the latter's illicit business. But this minor matter would have to wait. Just now Phil Dewey's interest in Andre Bergé was of a much more vital nature.

For several minutes after Mad Joe Throgg had headed downstream with his cargo of smuggled hooch, Bergé crouched on a sand pit watching the gray-banked stream. Then he came purposefully to his feet and started away through the thicket, bearing northeastward toward the Little Kanayak. A short distance behind the Frenchman, Phil Dewey followed.

Bergé was a born woodsman; so was Phil Dewey. The edge was in Phil's favor. Bergé traversed several miles totally unaware that he was being followed. But the Frenchman was suspicious. There could be but one answer to his great caution: the object of his journey was a vital one.

It was midday when they reached the little Kanayak, which tumbled noisily down through Dead Man's Run to join the leisurely Churchill twenty miles away. Here, Bergé's caution was redoubled. Bending low, he skirted the thicket-lined stream. At the end of every dozen yards or so, he stopped to listen.

Phil, following his man closely, was altogether unprepared when the Frenchman vanished abruptly. It was as though the earth had opened and swallowed him up. The particular spot where Bergé had disappeared was little more than a mile from Cutter Malone's cabin.

Flat on his stomach, Dewey wriggled his way through a dense black thicket of short-trunked spruce. A faint clattering sound caught and held his attention. He raised up on hands and knees. At first he could see nothing; then, the black shadows in the mouth of a wooded gully directly ahead thinned and melted away before his concentrated gaze.

Andre Bergé, a pile of wet leaves heaped up about his knees, was digging in the gravelly earth with his bare hands. At his side were several small moosehide pokes. As Dewey watched, two more of these heavy pokes joined their companions on the gravelly bank.

Phil swore savagely under his breath. He had recognized those moosehide pokes instantly as the property of Cutter Malone.

Gripping his rifle tightly, Phil came cautiously to his feet. Instantly he dropped again to his knees, then flat upon his face. There was a noisy crashing in the underbrush on the opposite side of the gully, caused apparently by the uncautious approach of some living thing. Phil's first thought was of—Stack Kilgallen. The young policeman had decided to stay on the ground for a while on the theory that the murderer of Cutter

Malone would return to the scene of the killing. He had found signs there which indicated to his professional eyes that the murderer, although a clever and methodical scoundrel, had been obliged to work hastily, leaving the scene before he had been able to adequately cover up his tracks.

The crashing noises in the thicket had ceased. Straining his eyes to pierce the blackness in the direction from which the sounds had come, Phil temporarily lost sight of Bergé. When finally he again turned his attention to the wooded gully where the Frenchman had been kneeling before that gravel-walled hole in the ground, the Frenchman had disappeared.

Phil was puzzled and vaguely alarmed. Bergé had apparently started out to investigate the cause of that noise. If he should stumble upon Kilgallen . . .

With the sole idea in mind of warning his friend, Dewey got quickly to his feet. He took a single tentative step forward, then stopped in his tracks as a burst of harsh laughter sounded directly behind him. He turned like a flash, swinging his rifle about even with his hip. Yet he didn't shoot. That first quick glance assured him that to pull the trigger of his gun would be suicide.

Andre Bergé stood less than a dozen yards away, rifle leveled at his heart.

"And so we meet again, eh, my friend?" The man's lips were smiling, but there was no laughter in his motionless black eyes. "You will please to drop the rifle, m'sieu."

Phil obliged. He shrugged, and his moccasined feet shuffled uneasily. In this shuffling process he succeeded in turning slightly so that he faced more directly the black thicket at the edge of the gully. There was a man there, crouching behind a downfallen tree. An errant finger of sunlight rested briefly on a whiskered face. Mad Joe Throgg!

"You are a smart man," Bergé was saying. "But also very foolish. Smart, because you trail' Andre Bergé without his knowing it. Foolish, because you think you can beat Andre Bergé. *Oui,* m'sieu, very, very foolish—for—you soon—will die!"

Phil shrugged again. "Just what will it get you to kill me, Bergé?" he asked coolly. "The police are in on this. You won't get away with it. You ought to know—"

The Frenchman's harsh laughter interrupted. "The police! Bah!" He sneered. "They are but children, and stupid. When I want to go, *voila,* I go! The police. . . .

"I am interested, m'sieu," Bergé continued, "to know how one so stupid as yourself could have *guessed* of *my* connection with this—ah—Malone affair? What persuaded you to follow *me?* Why?"

Under other circumstances Phil would have laughed at the Frenchman's childish conceit. He had no intention, however, of saying anything which might hasten the climax of this unpleasant little drama. It was up to him to stall for time. Out of the corner of his eye he saw Mad Joe Throgg fingering his rifle uncertainly. "I just guessed, and that's a fact," he admitted with what he intended to be a doubtful grin. "But you must admit I guessed right, Bergé. That's a habit I have—guessing right."

Andre Bergé shrugged expressively. A sneer twitched across his dark face. "A guess," he repeated. "And for the good guess I must kill a man."

"You did it," Dewey accused quietly. "I'm not guessing, now. I know!"

The Frenchman's sneer became a twisted smile. "Ah *oui,* to be sure, m'sieu. Why should I deny it? You have me—what is it you say?—with the goods. Why should I deny it? In one, maybe two, minutes—you die. I do not . . ."

The words seemed to stutter on the Frenchman's thin lips. From somewhere in the midst of the black thicket

a twig had cracked. Bergé turned just as Mad Joe Throgg came up on his knees, rifle at shoulder. With a snarling cry, the Frenchman swung his gun about. Two staccato reports sounded almost as one.

Bergé's gun had been, at least partially, trained upon Throgg. Phil Dewey did not wait to learn the outcome of that rapid exchange of shots. Like a flash he stooped, picked up his own rifle, swung the heavy weapon over his head, and hurled it with all his might. Bergé moving with amazing quickness, swung back, half faced Dewey, and fired quickly. But the hasty shot went wild. For just as he pulled the trigger, Phil's gun struck him in the face. The stricken man stumbled backward, tripped, half fell. Before he could recover his balance, Dewey was upon him.

Despite his comparatively slim body, the Frenchman was wiry and strong. He fought furiously, utilizing every murderous trick he had learned in a lifetime spent in the Canadian backwoods. But he stood little chance with the furious Yankee. A fist propelled by two hundred pounds of bone and muscle caught him under his ear. . . . The fight was over.

Breathing hard, Phil stumbled to his feet. The odor of tobacco smoke came to him and he pivoted quickly about, snatching up his rifle as he turned. He swore softly under his breath. There, sitting on a stump a dozen yards away, was Kilgallen.

"Where in hell did you come from?" Phil queried unpolitely.

The young policeman's grin broadened; he removed his pipe. "Really you know, old top," he smiled, "I wouldn't have missed that fight for worlds. Perhaps you were a bit rough, but damn, you *are* deucedly handy with your fists. I have an idea I could beat you. . . . No, no, not now," he added, as Dewey started forward.

Phil stopped. He had just caught sight of Mad Joe Throgg lying a-sprawl across the fallen log. There was a tiny blue hole between the madman's eyes.

"I heard it all," Kilgallen was saying. "Jolly clever, you know, Phil, the way you persuaded that blighter to confess."

"You mean to tell me you stood out there on the sidelines and let Bergé shoot Throgg down in cold blood?"

Corporal Kilgallen was bending over Bergé's unconscious body. "Absolutely, old blossom," he admitted cheerfully. "Friend Throgg *was* wanted for three particularly brutal murders. He was, as you perhaps observed, a bit cracked, whiffy—insane in other words. I disliked taking the scoundrel in. Mad or not, he knew what he was doing most of the time, and those killings for which he was responsible were all undertaken when he was quite sane. Certainly he deserved the death penalty if any man ever did. But he would have gotten by on an insanity plea, and the Crown would have supported him for the rest of his worthless life. No—perhaps I was wrong, Phil, but I was hoping all along that friend Bergé would solve the problem for me. And he jolly well did, you know."

Phil was bound to agree with the young policeman's logic.

"But tell me, Phil," Kilgallen went on, "how did you get—ah—hep to this bounder? I mean to say, what made you suspicious of him in the first place? I heard what you told him, old thing, but I knew you were spoofing."

Phil Dewey's blue eyes gleamed. From the unconscious man's coat pocket he extracted the deed supposedly signed by Cutter Malone. "He showed me this," Phil explained. "It's not a bad forgery. But, you see, it's a copy of *my* handwriting. Poor old Cutter used to carry on quite a correspondence with various mail order houses. I wrote all his letters for him. Cutter Malone could neither read nor write."

THE CARE OF PELTS

By Claude Rister

Here is an interesting and valuable fact article on the treatment of hard-won pelts. Some of this advice may even be a matter of dollars and cents to you.

IN a series of articles written for ACE-HIGH MAGAZINE, I have explained my methods of trapping for various North American fur-bearing animals. Perhaps some of the readers who have followed the series through will jump to the conclusion that now all they need do to make some good money at trapping is to go into fur country properly equipped and there carefully follow out the instructions which have been laid down. Such an idea would be a mistake, for there is another side to trapping, one which is quite as important as knowing how to outwit the cunning creatures of the wild. I mean the proper handling of pelts.

What does it avail a trapper to bring in a big load of skins if he is not to get at least a halfway fair price for them? And this he cannot do unless they are properly cased and cured.

It is really surprising how few of the people who make a practice of doing a little trapping each winter know anything at all about the proper handling of pelts. They seem to think that quantity, not quality, is the most important factor. If they make a big season's catch, and then get a few dollars for it, they beam in blissful ignorance of the fact that they might have received twice as much if the furs had been properly prepared for market. Many a time I have known amateur trappers to get for their furs only about twenty-five percent of what they should have had. To me it seems a darned shame that a person should exercise so much patience and care in the setting of traps and then, when the quarry is captured, become careless and dispose of the skin for a mere fraction of its potential value.

Many an amateur trapper is disappointed, too, when, after reading the fur quotations, he expects a nice check for his shipment and gets a very small one instead. I know, for I have had that experience. It is in order to save others the same bitter disappointment that I mean to explain how to handle pelts so as to get the greatest return out of them.

To begin with, do not trap out of season. Pelts taken in summer are "springy," thin coated, and almost worthless. Besides, summer is the propagating season, and our game and fur animals must be protected if we are to continue enjoying the sports of hunting and trapping.

All furs are closely graded by the purchasing dealers. The market listings bear such wording as: Number One Prime, Number Two Prime, Number One Unprime, etc. The numbers refer to the sizes of the pelts; the terms "prime" and "unprime" refer to their condition. Nearly worthless ones are usually called "scabs." Speaking generally, a prime pelt is one that was taken during season; that is, in the winter.

It would be impossible for any one to state definite dates when furs are prime and when they become unprime. It all depends on location and weather. For instance, furs that would become prime in Alaska in the fall might not become prime in California or South Texas until December, if at all. Again, in the same locality they might be good very early one season, while the next year they might be nearly worthless until late, depending upon whether the winter was a hard or a mild one.

In this matter the trapper must use his own good sense. When winter really sets in, pelts quickly become

prime, but until the cold weather does come, leave the fur-bearers alone.

THERE are two ways of skinning, namely: "cased" and "open." Sometimes the term "round" is used instead of cased, and "flat" instead of open. A cased pelt is one which has been removed by pulling the skin down over the animal's body, much as a sock might be removed from a man's foot, or a glove from a hand. The open style is the manner in which beef hides are removed.

The bear, mountain lion, badger, beaver and wolverine are skinned open. The bobcat, wolf, coyote, and the racoon may be skinned either cased or open. All other pelts should be cased.

To remove a pelt in case style, slit the skin down the back of the hind legs and around the vent. If the animal happens to be one of the weasel family, cut easily around the musk pouches. Slit the under side of the tail about a third the way of its length.

With your knife, ring the skin just above the hind feet or, if you prefer, cut the feet off entirely, and then start the skin peeling toward the head. When you have reached the tail, pull away the skin as far as you have slit it with the knife and then stop. Now split a little green stick. With your right hand grip the skinned part of the tail bone between the two pieces of wood. Pull upward, and the same time push away against the root of the tail with the left hand. You will find that in most cases the brush will slip right off the remainder of the bone. If it fails to do so, you will have to do some further slitting with the knife.

Obviously, such tails as those of the muskrat, the beaver, and the opossum should be left on the carcasses, as they carry no fur.

After the hind legs and the tail have been skinned, start slipping the pelt downward over the body, turning the skin flesh side out as you go. When you reach the shoulders, punch back the elbows of the front legs until you can work a thumb between them and the skin, then strip them right out. Be careful how you wield a knife, for every hole you cut in a pelt will lessen its market value.

When you have turned the pelt down to the head, great care must then be exercised. Many deft, short rakes with the knife will be necessary to keep the skin peeling. Be certain that you snip the ears off deep enough, or you may be surprised later to find that you have cut them away from the hide. Also, take care not to enlarge the eye sockets or to remove the skin raggedly from about the edges of the mouth. Take the tip of the nose along with the pelt, but cut it shallow enough so that no flesh or bone will adhere, to become tainted later.

When the skinning job is finished, you will have a slender fur bag, open at both ends and with the pelt side out. Turn it back with the fur outside, and keep it that way until you are ready to flesh and stretch it.

To remove a skin "open," cut down the under sides of all four legs, and then slit the length of the under side from the chin to a third the way up the tail. Peel the skin away from the body so that when it is removed it will lie flat, like a rug. The brush is removed "whole," as in the casing process.

The beaver is a special job, inasmuch as the legs are not to be opened. Slit only from the chin to the base of the tail, and remove the legs cased. This is a rather difficult operation at first, but becomes easier with practice.

In skinning both the beaver and the otter, care should be taken to remove as much of the flesh and fat as possible from the pelt at the time of skinning. It is very difficult to get off afterward. And, by the way, the tail of the otter must be slit all the

way to its tip. It is too thick to permit "shucking."

All pelts should be fleshed as soon after removal from the body as it is practicable for you to get at the job. Put each one on a stretching board or on the end of a pole. Use some dull instrument for fleshing. I like a hatchet that has a blunt edge. Scoot the surplus flesh and fat away from the pelt by pushing away from you with the hatchet-head, sliding it downward from the neck toward the tail in long, even strokes. Be careful not to smear fat all over the fur at the lower edge of the pelt. Good, clean furs mean bigger checks. Bits of muscle that the hatchet will not move must be cut away with a knife.

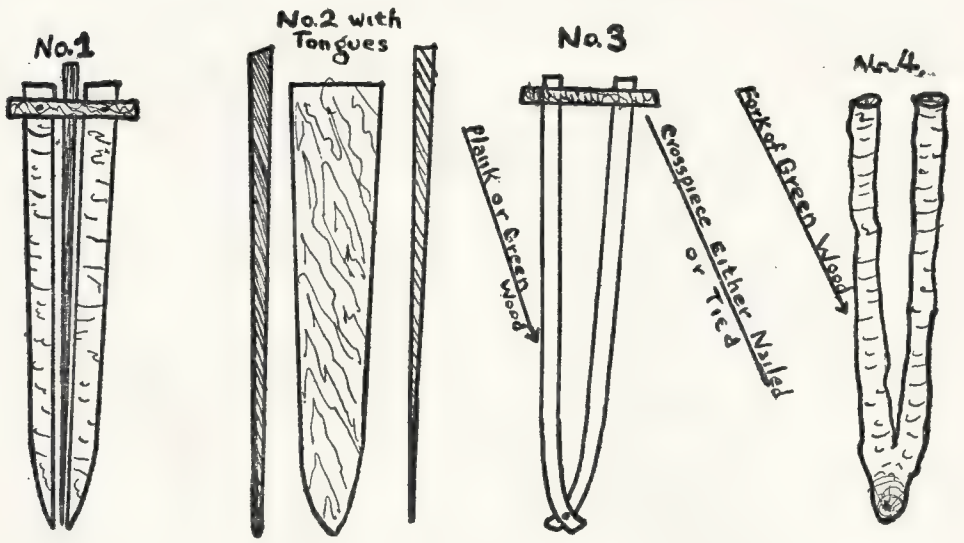
A word of warning in this fleshing process: Do not be over-zealous. Just take off the excess flesh and fat, and no more. Don't rub the pelt threadbare. Also, be careful with your scraping instrument, lest it slip through the pelt.

Remove the clotted blood from the area where the animal was shot or clubbed. Blood is always an inducement to flies.

Often, in the process of stripping away the brush, a few joints at the tail-tip will break off and adhere inside. When this happens, an incision must be made and the joints removed, as otherwise they would spoil and cause some of the hair to drop out. Before you call the fleshing job finished, therefore, always feel carefully along the entire extent of the brush to make sure that it has shucked away clean.

If you melt down the fat obtained from the skins of animals, you will find it very good for oiling traps and for rubbing into dry leather. Also, it makes a fair scent lure when asafetida, anise oil, and the contents of a skunk's musk-bags are added to it.

AND now comes the subject of stretching. Let us first consider cased skins. Here are a few drawings of casing boards:



You will notice that all of these stretchers are so arranged that they can be lessened in width. This feature is essential. As a skin cures, it draws as tight as a drumhead. And one stretched on a board that could not

be lessened in width would have to be cut away later on. I found this out to my sorrow the first time I went to remove furs for shipment.

Sometimes the tightening of a hide will cause a three-piece board to buckle laterally. It is to prevent this buckling that the pieces are nailed across the butt of the stretcher.

Always make the tongues of stretching boards longer than the boards themselves so that a handhold remains when they are inserted. When you are ready to remove the cured pelt, grasp this handhold firmly, hold the pelt head downward, and then strike the butt of the stretcher sharply with a hammer. As soon as the wooden tongue slips free, the rest of the board will come out easily.

Board Number Two is a plain, solid one with tongues which are inserted at the sides. When these tongues are pulled out, the pelt usually slips off the stretcher without much trouble. This board does not give the pretty case that the first one does, but then the facilities for the manufacture of board Number One are not always available to the trapper. In such cases, stretcher Number Two makes a very good substitute.

Numbers Three and Four are crude ones that may be used in emergencies. The trapper may run out of boards. Or perhaps he "packed in" to the fur country and could not take along such things. In fact, there are several reasons why he might not have them. Obviously, these two frames do not give a very good stretch, but they are much better than nothing at all. When they are employed, the butt of the pelt is laced to the rear cross-piece to prevent its slipping downward as the pelt dries. Any kind of stout, springy green wood may be used.

Whatever contrivance is used, it should be just large enough so that the pelt, when gloved over it inside out, or fleshed side exposed, will get an even, firm stretch. Tack the nose of the pelt to the point of the board. Also tack down the under-lip piece. Draw back the hind parts and tack them to the board.

When the stretching job is complete, hang the pelts, tail downward, in some dry, shady place to cure. Never leave them out in the full rays of the sun to burn dry.

It is a good idea to make a small slit in the end of the tail, in order to permit the passage of air through the tube of the brush.

In casing such long-legged animals as the lynx and the coyote, a green stick or splinter of board may be placed inside each leg to prevent their drawing and twisting in unsightly fashion. Keep the skins neat and clean.

Open skins are sometimes stretched by tacking onto a cabin wall. I have learned from experience, though, that termites and other insects sometimes ruin furs put up in this way.

I think the best way to stretch open furs is to lace them up between saplings, or within a simple framework made by tying four sticks together in rectangular fashion.

The pelts of beavers and racoons require special attention. The pelt of the beaver should be stretched as nearly round, and that of the 'coon as nearly square, as possible. The fur buyers want them that way. Just why, I do not know.

Since the beaver pelt should be cured round, or nearly so, about the best way to stretch one is to lace it within a circular framework made by bending together the ends of a willow rod or some other limb that is flexible.

The market quotations of practically all the big fur dealers bear the notation: "Case fox skins fur side out." If you follow this advice literally, you will have trouble, for the pelt side will stick to the stretching board in drying, and you will have the devil's own time in getting it loose.

The proper thing to do is to stretch fox pelts with fur side in, just as

you would any other skin, except that you turn the legs fur side out and leave them on the under side, next to the board. If you did not treat the legs in this manner, you would experience difficulty in turning them after they had dried. Place the fox pelt in a dry airy place and let it hang for no longer than twenty-four hours, then take it off the board, turn it, and put it back on the stretcher. If the weather is inclined to be warm, then perhaps it would be wise to allow the skin to remain fur side in for only about twelve hours. The idea is to turn it fur side out before it becomes so stiff that it would be hard to turn without breaking or crinkling the fiber of the skin.

A few other animals, such as the marten, the coyote, and the lynx, are also sometimes cased fur side out.

Once in a great while something happens to prevent a person from getting a skin onto a stretching board before it draws up and hardens. When this happens it is impossible to stretch it without loosening it up. This may be accomplished by soaking it in water. Remember, though, that this is an emergency measure only, and that the soaking of a pelt is almost certain to do it some damage. I have known a few men who salted pelts, believing that it helped in the curing process. To my mind this is bad business. Salt creates dampness, and pelts must be kept dry. Again, I believe that the salt eats into the fiber of the skin and weakens it.

Let me issue a solemn warning to all persons not experienced in the handling of furs: Watch them closely while they are curing. Buzzards, hawks, and owls sometimes damage them. There are wild animals, too, such as the sneaking wolverine, that will ruin them if they get half a chance. A bobcat once got at a bunch of my furs and ripped several of them so badly that they were rendered almost worthless.

In preparing furs for shipment, place sheets of newspaper between each layer. Those which are cased with fur side out should be wrapped in paper so their fur will not become oily from contact with the others.

Wrap the bundle neatly in burlap, or a double thickness of gunnysacking, and sack-sew it snugly. It should then be bound in secure fashion.

The dealer to whom you are shipping, and who has furnished you with fur quotations, will have sent you a batch of shipping tags. Of course, if you have none of these tags, those furnished by the express company will do. Two of them should accompany the shipment, one inside and the other outside. Outside tags sometimes become torn off, and the inside one is to make sure your valuable shipment does not go astray.

Just a word concerning fur dealers: There are a number of them in the country, some good and some bad. I believe that most of them treat the trapper fairly. Some, however, make a practice of quoting high rates and then paying low ones. The trapper is wholly at their mercy, for he cannot grade his own furs and must accept whatever grading and consequent payment they give him. All I can say in this regard is just to watch your dealer. Compare prices paid with prices quoted. If you decide that you are not getting fair treatment, try some other firm.

In the next issue!

TRAPPING THE MARTEN AND THE FISHER

by Claude Rister

MEN OF THE DESERT

By Cliff Farrell

Across miles of parched desert waste, Rand Darnell and Buzz Bisbee fought their way in pursuit of a killer. Darnell was the law in that part of Arizona; it was his duty to arrest murderers. Bisbee went along, grimly interested, because his brother was involved in the killing. Somehow, it was just plumb fortunate that there happened to be two of them on the trail. . . .

OUT of the heat blaze that held the desert in a suffocating daze, and caused the bleak, steely mountains to shimmer and dance weirdly on the horizon, came a riderless horse bringing with it a wordless message.

The little 'dobe-walled town of Tularosa, a mere dot in the thorny Arizona landscape, flanked on every side by spiny cholla and writhing ocotillo, stirred from its noon siesta, then roused fully as the animal, gaunt and dried-out, clattered over the baked 'dobe, the eagle bill taps on the stirrups flapping wildly. The horse had buried its dry nose in the ironwood trough in the little plaza before Rand Darnell reached it.

Rand, frozen-eyed, seamy of face and grim, represented the law in Tularosa. He wore a town marshal's badge although he was, in reality, also sheriff and ranger in this region. Tularosa was the jumping-off point for the desert, the end of the Tucson stage line and the last outpost of the law north of the Border.

"Chuck Mitchell's hawss," somebody cried as others arrived.

"An' blood on the riggin'," another added ominously.

"Saddle bags gone," a third chimed in. "Dawgone. Robbed shore as hell. An' killed, mebbe."

Rand said nothing. He was busy inspecting the animal as he forced it to drink slowly in order to save it from foundering.

The marshal's eyes, shaded by bushy, iron-gray brows, saw a bullet furrow in the right tapadera, and he probed the hole with a knife. In a moment he produced a lead pellet that had been embedded in the wooden stirrup beneath the leather hood.

"That's a forty-one, sure as I'm an inch tall," he said aloud as he inspected the slug which was only slightly flattened.

The group about him suddenly became quiet. Men squirmed uneasily and eyed Rand Darnell curiously.

In this little community where the Colt forty-five was the usual weapon, they knew of only one man who carried a weapon firing this smaller bullet. And that man was Slug Bisbee. And Slug Bisbee was Buzz Bisbee's brother. . . .

"Take good care of that hawss, Sam," the marshal said, turning the reins over to a bystander. And he headed down the street toward the saloon whose sign proclaimed it as Buzz Bisbee's Blue-sky Cafe.

Rand pushed through the butterfly door and stepped into the low-ceilinged room, the little windows of which, set in thick walls, admitted only dim light.

Except for a bartender, the place was deserted.

"Where's yore boss?" Rand asked quietly.

The bartender's eyes were wide, for never before had Rand Darnell stepped into the Blue-sky bar.

"I'll git him," the employee hastened to say, hurrying into a rear room.

A minute later Buzz Bisbee, a challenge in his cold eyes, pushed into the room. He paused, his head lowered, glaring. . . .

Some said that the silent feud between Buzz Bisbee and Rand Darnell must have had a woman as its foundation. But the more discerning knew, or rather guessed, the truth. The primary cause was vague but nevertheless real. In some circles it would have been called psychological.

For Buzz Bisbee and Rand Darnell were too closely cast in the same mold—a mold of steel. They were hard men, quick on the trigger, fearless and proud. Buzz Bisbee had killed in his day. So had Rand Darnell. They were leaders in their own right. Therefore, they had always avoided each other, as do all moving things whose strength is equal.

With time sliding them both past the half-century mark, Bisbee had gravitated into his present occupation while Rand, by natural aptitude, had assumed the task of enforcing desert law.

"Where's yore brother?" Rand asked.

Bisbee stiffened. He towered over Rand by a full four inches and his bulk was imposing. But Rand himself was a chiseled block of granite, broad, powerful and tough.

"What's it to yuh?" Bisbee said.

"Chuck Mitchell's hawss jest came back down the trail with blood on the gear an' a bullet hole in a stirrup," Rand shot back. "Chuck left this mawnin', as usual, with the payroll for the Desert Rose Mine back in the Combabi Mountains."

"What's that got tuh do with Slug?" Bisbee demanded, his lips tightening.

"This," Rand said, holding out the piece of lead for inspection. "I found a forty-one slug in the stirrup on Mitchell's hawss."

For an instant there was silence. Bisbee's face grew gray. . . .

"Yuh don't think the kid would do a thing like that, do yuh?" he finally said.

"I ain't thinkin'," Rand replied. "If he's here I'd like tuh palaver with him."

"He left town this mawnin'," Bisbee said slowly and reluctantly. "Headin' north."

"I reckon I'll be ridin' then," Rand put in, turning.

"No yuh don't!" Bisbee cried with a snarl. "Yuh ain't goin' out there tuh gun down that kid. He wouldn't do a thing like that. He wouldn't—"

"I ain't gunnin' nobody unless they resist," Rand snapped back, his eyes narrowing. "As for him bein' a kid, he's thirty years old an' kin take care of hisself. At least he's been tryin' tuh live up tuh the family reputation by hellin' around here ever since yuh imported him from California."

"I'm tellin' yuh tuh spread yore loop in some other direction," Bisbee said thinly. His eyes were set and his jaw tight.

Rand whirled to face him, his six-shooter streaking into his hand and covering the old gunman. Bisbee had not gone for his own weapon. But neither did he elevate his hands.

"I'm ridin' an' I don't want no advice," Rand warned him.

The marshal heard a movement and some instinct caused him to duck just as a beer mallet, propelled by the white-aproned bartender, whizzed through the air where his head had been.

Rand's gun changed direction and boomed a deafening shot at the same instant. The bartender's throwing arm was still extended, and the forty-five slug grazed the forearm, ripping a red furrow. The fellow reeled back, clutching the injury.

Rand, in firing, had turned away from Buzz Bisbee. He now expected the impact of a bullet from the gunman's weapon. He whirled again on Bisbee, lifting the hammer of his own gun, ready to take his opponent with him into death.

But Bisbee still stood there, his hands at his sides, his face immobile. He had not taken advantage of the break.

"I could have drilled yuh," he said. "But I figger I better wait awhile."

"I'll come back," Rand promised.

"I ain't so shore," Bisbee said. "So I reckon I'll ride with yuh."

"I don't need no help."

"But my brother does," Bisbee returned significantly. "I ain't hankerin' tuh have a Bisbee rung up as another notch on yore gun, feller."

Rand's lips whitened at the insult. He never had drawn a gun in his life except in self-defense. And he knew in his heart that, despite scandal and gossip, Buzz Bisbee's record was clean in that respect too.

"Come on then," Rand said. "I'll chance a bullet in the back."

"I'm goin' out tuh look at Mitchell's hawss an' that bullet hole," Bisbee said heavily. "Then I'll be with yuh."

Ten minutes later all Tularosa gaped and marveled as the two veterans lined out of town on fast horses, carrying food and canteens, heading northward over the route that Chuck Mitchell, the paymaster, had taken that morning. That road wound for fifty miles back into the Combabi Mountains to a mining camp. However, the two riders knew that whatever fate had befallen the paymaster had taken place within an hour's ride of Tularosa.

They found the spot just ten miles out. It was mid-afternoon, and the heat was withering in intensity, as they halted in a small, brush-lined draw through which the dim road was cut.

Beside the way a blackened heap of burned brush still smoldered slightly. And on it lay a horrible, charred object.

"Mitchell's body, I reckon," Rand remarked, dismounting and approaching the pyre.

Bisbee said nothing. He had been silent since their departure. He merely stared at the charred heap, his eyes lifeless, the stubble of graying beard on his chin seeming to quiver like dead ashes stirred by the breeze.

Rand, shrinking from his task, nevertheless made a minute inspection. Chuck Mitchell had been a secretive, furtive individual, and Rand had never cottoned to him. But a murder was a murder.

The slayer had made sure that his victim was left beyond identification. Dead creosote-bush, mesquite and palo verde branches had been used for fuel, and but little more than blackened bones remained on the embers.

With the silent gunman assisting him, Rand piled rocks over the body. Then he circled about through the open growth of creosote-bush. Finally he found the trail. A single horse had left the road.

And the trail pointed south—into the desert.

"Yuh comin'?" Rand asked, a hint of challenge in his voice.

Bisbee nodded. But his eyes were fixed on a stunted screw-bean tree that sprawled grotesquely against a rocky slope back from the trail. He swung his big form to the ground and approached the tree. Rand followed, also staring in a puzzled way at a fresh wound in the trunk. It was as though someone had dug deep into the stringy bark with a knife.

"Looks like a bullet might have been dug out of that hole," Bisbee remarked.

"Mebbe," Rand said, not committing himself.

They mounted and headed up the rocky slope out of the defile. In a few minutes they were following the trail.

They mounted a ridge and before them, blanching in the fierce sun, lay the Tule Desert, a hell of cacti and sun-glazed earth relieved by clumps of sparse creosote-bush and mesquite and devils-chair ocotillo.

This was midsummer and what few water holes there were in the Tule were uncertain propositions. But the slayer had gone down there, so the two grim men followed.

After an hour, Rand's eyes saw something hanging in the midst of a growth of scrub cholla. With an ocotillo cane, he retrieved it and held it up for Bisbee's inspection.

"My brother's hat," the old gunman said quietly. "An' there's blood on it."

Rand added the hat to his saddle gear and they rode on.

The pair of canteens they carried were partly empty already, and they knew that their margin of safety was slender, for a human's normal consumption of water in the desert at this season totals two gallons per day. A mere two or three hours without at least a mouthful of water would mean death. Both men knew it. However, they were veterans of this bleak land and rode on. . . .

"Kinda queer that a bullet would be stopped by a thin wooden stirrup, ain't it?" Bisbee commented, after an hour of hard going through cholla thickets and over flinty, knifelike surfaces that threatened to maim the horses.

"Reckon it was a spent bullet, fired at the hawss as it spooked," Rand said. But he rolled the thought over in his mind. It *was* queer. Doubly so, when he suddenly recalled a fact that he had disregarded previously. He remembered now that the bullet hole in the stirrup had gone entirely through the wood, *whereas the bullet still remained in the wood.*

"There's a tank about thirty-five miles ahead, in the shoulder of that needle range," Rand said later on, pointing. The sun was setting and the fugitive's trail pointed definitely toward that point.

They pushed on as the night brought grateful coolness. Their water was gone and each man rolled a plug of mesquite wood on his tongue as a palliative. It was midnight when the eagerness of the horses told them that they were getting near the water hole.

"I'll scout the tank," Rand said, dismounting and drawing his gun. "You squat here."

In the darkness there was a moment of silence. Rand tensed. But Bisbee was apparently indifferent.

"Go ahead," he agreed. "But no murderer would be fool enough tuh lay over the first night at the nearest tank."

Bisbee was right. Rand, after a quiet approach, reached the cranny in the rocky face of the abrupt mountainside. The tank was deserted. He struck a match and the welcome gleam of water, five feet down in the hole, rewarded him. The tank was well curbed with mesquite limbs and stems so that no reptiles or wild game could fall in.

"Hey," Rand shouted, and Bisbee soon joined him.

Rand lowered a canteen on a picket

line weighed with a rock, while the horses champed impatiently. The canteen filled and he drew it up.

"Have a man-sized drink," he said gruffly, extending the canteen to Bisbee.

The old gunman took it and tilted it to his lips. But without drinking, he suddenly lowered it and returned it to Rand.

"After you," he said.

Rand stared at him in the faint starlight and then, with a shrug, prepared to drink long and deep.

Suddenly a hand snatched the canteen from his lips.

"Better not," Bisbee said. "Smell it. Arsenic!"

And Rand detected the poisonous tang at the same moment. He set the canteen down, and silently they built a fire.

"This tank was pure last winter," Rand finally remarked. "I passed down thisaway, huntin' bighorn."

"Yeah," Bisbee said. "The stuff was poured intuh it not ten hours ago."

Using ocotillo branches as torches, for the reeds of that plant burn with a fierce white light and are the "candle plant" of the southwest, they searched up the mountainside above the tank. They finally found a deep slit in a rock, far down in which was water. By hitching picket lines together, they managed to bring enough of the stuff to the surface to water the horses. But the pool was stale and tainted with the bodies of insects and possibly lizards which had fallen into it. The men were not so thirsty as to be tempted by this brackish water.

"Yuh could have let me drink that arsenic and then gone back tuh Tularosa," Rand said as they rolled into their blankets for an hour's rest.

Bisbee's only reply was a grunt. And Rand drifted to slumber with a question in his mind. It was not natural that brother should hunt brother, especially when Buzz Bisbee was the hunter.

THEY set out before dawn after a dry breakfast.

"He's making the *jornadas* at night," Rand observed as they swung away, their horses kettling and unwilling—heading southward with the Tule now surrounding them like a barbed blanket.

Bisbee nodded. By necessity, the pursuers must make their *jornadas*, these dry marches, by day, because the trail was at best a dim, uncertain thing and hard to follow, even in the sunlight.

In an hour both men were burning with thirst. Then they found the first barrel cactus that they had seen on the trip, and they dismounted eagerly. With a skinning knife, Rand cut off the rounded top of the thorny, hairy plant which stood three feet high. Then Bisbee, with a mesquite club, pounded the fleshy pulp loose and with their hands they squeezed nearly a gallon of water from it. This they carefully scooped into the canteens, taking a few mouthfuls to alleviate their thirst. This water was remarkably cool, carrying the flavor of a turnip, but it was life-giving nectar to them.

They found two more of the plants and drained them. Soon they left the barrel cacti behind and entered a weird, forlorn land where the giant saguaro commanded the landscape, the fluted columns with their spiny branches standing like solemn candelabra over a dying world. The cacti water, eeked out drop by drop, carried them through a day of heat-daze.

But the horses were in a bad way before they reached the second water hole, which both Rand and Bisbee knew as *Augua Dulce* (sweet water). It lay in a rock basin on the flank of one of the weird mountains that rise so abruptly from the desert floor like pyramids. But it was sweet water no longer. Rand and the old gunman dismounted and stared at the ten-foot, circular hole. The curb had been torn away, and the marks were fresh.

In addition, the tank had been filled with dead cholla joints. And there is nothing more fearsome to handle than the cholla. Its million fine barbs are the terror of man and beast alike. Woe betide the animal or human who blunders fully into its clutches. Both Rand and Bisbee had seen its work: cattle to whose snouts the fiendish plant had adhered and which had died of thirst and agony; skeletons of men, with balls of the cholla still holding their paralyzed fingers clenched, had died of thirst, unable to open their hands to help themselves. So they approached the task carefully. By using ropes and poles from the thornless palo verde tree, they managed to clear the tank after an hour of tedious work.

Darkness had descended in the meantime, so they held a flaming torch down to inspect the water which, at best, was but little more than a scum on the alkaline bottom. Then they shivered and looked up at each other. The body of a four-foot, diamond-back rattler, bloated and horrible, lay there in the slime. And a dying chuckawalla that had fallen in since the curb was removed was gasping its last. . . .

"He killed the snake an' throwed it in there," Rand said with a twisted smile. "He must have run out of arsenic."

They boiled some of the water and gave it to the horses. And Rand, with thirst sweeping away his scruples, decided to chance it too.

But Buzz Bisbee had another card of desert lore up his sleeve. He grubbed along a nearby draw with a torch and found a reedlike plant that stood up as a slender, thorny, single shoot, only three feet high. It was of the cactus family. Bisbee dug down with a tin plate and pointed sticks and found the root. Not even Rand Darnell, no amateur in matters of desert survival, had known that such a source of water existed. For the tiny plant had a beetlike, tubular root fully thirteen inches long and six around. This was pulpy and watery, a natural storage root that could support its shoot for three or four years without rain. Bisbee knew it only as the water-bag plant.

They found two more of these plants and squeezed the sap from them. And so they started on the third day of their hunt. The marshal now suddenly realized that it was Buzz Bisbee who was actually leading this grim chase.

There was some evidence that they were gaining. The pursuers no longer spent much time looking for sign because there was but one course now—to the next water hole—and they made greater speed. However, when they did encounter the trail in soft soil or sand, they could see that the slayer's mount was dragging weary hoofs. It had been pushed too fast at the start.

"Today, mebbe," Rand thought grimly at noon, as they stared toward a distant, greenish-gray line that fringed a barranca, extending out from a low range to the south. That line of color marked the presence of palo verde, cottonwood and smoke trees. And trees meant the likelihood of water.

Their own horses weakened during the afternoon, and it was long after dark before they reached the barranca. Meanwhile, their quarry had flown. They found his campsite. It was in the barranca and, as usual, the fugitive had taken pains to halt any pursuit. A shallow depression in the floor of the barranca, a natural pool that had retained some of the water from the last cloudburst rushing down from the mountains, was rapidly drying, the mud cracking and dampness still showing in the veins. A hole had been dug in the lower end of the pool, allowing the water to drain out into a sandy area below, where it had sunk from sight.

Rand and Buzz scouted up and down the course until midnight, but

they found no more pools, so they returned to the original spot and began to dig in the sand below the vanished water hole. After more than an hour of digging through dry, loose stuff with sticks and plates, the sand became damp. At a depth of about five feet sluggish water began to seep in. They spent the night without sleep, salvaging enough to water the horses and fill their canteens. At daylight they were in the saddle again, weary, but with full canteens.

"Today is the day," Rand said at noon, and this time he was positive. The trail headed for a nearby lava range, and there, both men knew, was a big water hole known as Papago Tank, the most reliable on the desert. By hard riding they could reach it before sundown. And the trail gave unquestionable evidence that their quarry's horse was done for.

"If we don't git him today, we'll never do it," declared Rand later on.

The Tule Desert was behind them now and they were nearing the Sonoyta lava mountains that straddle the international line. Once the fugitive gained that flinty jumble of lava and craters where water holes abounded and where his trail would be lost on the hard surfaces, he could evade them and escape into Mexico to make his way westward to the gulf and safety.

Rand had been leading the way, but he now fell to the rear. Bisbee registered no expression, yet both men knew the reason for the marshal's move.

"I'll risk a bullet in the back," Rand had said before they started. But now, with the fleeing murderer near, he was on his guard.

They diverged slightly westward, taking advantage of a rise that shielded their approach. After ten miles of fast progress, Rand called a halt and, on foot, made his way to the crest of a rise.

The first slopes of the Sonoytas lay not two miles away, From a draw, just beyond an outthrust shoulder, rose a thin, wavering band of gray smoke—a campfire. Rand lay there, peering across the draw, considering the best route of approach. Then he heard a rustle behind him and whirled—to find himself gazing into the bore of Buzz Bisbee's forty-five. For a moment the gaunt, travel-worn pair stared into each other's eyes. Rand's hands crept above his head.

"So yuh come out in yore true colors," the marshal gritted. "I should have knowed better than to trust yuh."

"Yo're stayin' here," Bisbee ordered in an emotionless voice. "I'm goin' ahead."

"Tuh help yore brother vamose with the payroll, eh?" Rand said bitterly. "Why not shoot me an' git it over with."

"I'll come back," Bisbee replied. "Git up. I'm takin' yuh back tuh the horses. I'll tie yuh up—loose—so yuh can free yoreself in an hour or so in case I don't come back."

"I'll foller yuh tuh the front door of hell," Rand promised sincerely. "Yuh better put me away now, Bisbee. I'm shootin' on sight if I find you an' yore brother."

Bisbee said nothing but prodded the helplessly enraged officer down the slope to the horses. True to his word, he ran a few loops of whale line around Rand's arms and legs and left him lying in the hot shade of a creosote-bush. The bonds were not so tight but that Rand could work them loose in time.

Bisbee disappeared — afoot. That amazed the marshal, too. Nevertheless, he began to struggle fiercely, and in fifteen minutes he was free.

Then Rand also set out afoot, veering away in a short circle, taking advantage of all the cover he could find, heading for the tank beyond the shoulder. The sun was setting before he reached the rise, although he had hurried. Buzz Bisbee had not even relieved him of his gun, which was

another bewildering patch in this crazy quilt.

On hands and knees, he approached the rim of the shoulder. The finger of smoke no longer rose beyond it. Rand was afraid that he was too late. A curse whispered from his throat as he peered over. He was gazing down at the tank—rock-bound like most water holes in the desert, cradled in a deep depression in the flinty rock two hundred feet below. And his fears were realized. . . .

The flat shelf of rock above the tank was empty. The black dots of a hundred campfires lay there, and one of the dots still smoldered slightly. But there was no living person present.

"Brothers—" Rand spat. "They're together. . . . An' they've vamosed."

Impatiently, he arose and scrambled down the slope. He was thirsty and the tank lured him. The water was clean, held there as it was in a natural basin. A narrow cleft, just big enough for a man's body, was the only accessible approach. Rand, on hands and knees, crept down to the brink and thrust his hands in to scoop water to his mouth.

The shadows were long, and he could not see into the dark pool as he reached into the water.

And then—

Snap!

A surge of water! A frantic leap! But too late; he was caught. Thrown off balance, he tumbled over, his head dipping into the pool. By squirming desperately, he managed to push his body back onto the ledge of lava. But his arms were held in a steel grip just below the surface.

A trap! A large coyote trap! That was what held his wrists. The steel teeth were biting through the leather cuffs that he wore and his hands were already growing numb. He was caught hard and fast. The trap was anchored securely just below the surface, its chain firmly weighted down by a boulder, its prong wedged into a slit in the rocky basin. And in his position, Rand dared not exert full strength for fear he might tumble bodily into the pool and drown, unable to free himself.

He cursed the devilish ingenuity of the thing. But he knew how that trap had got there. The slayer had brought it with him from the scene of the murder. Chuck Mitchell, in his spare time, trapped coyotes, and he usually carried some of his equipment with him on his trips to and from the mine, setting them out at likely points and collecting the skins that paid both bounty and fur money.

"That cussed hombre shore planned ahead for this job," Rand told himself, recalling the arsenic. That, too, had been a part of the paymaster's coyote-killing equipment.

The trap had been wedged in a crevice, just below the surface, at exactly the only point where a man would thrust his hands into the water. And Rand had sprung the trigger on himself.

He continued to struggle, but it was useless. . . .

Dusk had crept into the pocket and Rand, gritting his teeth, looked forward to long torture, with death as inevitable.

"Two of a kind," he told himself bitterly. "Killers by trade an' murderers by choice."

And then he heard a stone rattle down the slope above the tank. Twisting his head hopefully, he gazed up. A sardonic laugh drifted down to him and he saw the dark figure of a hatless man silhouetted above the rim of the shoulder.

"Got yore fingers in it, didn't yuh?" a cracked, cackling voice asked. "Damn yuh, I saw yuh sneakin' toward this tank when yuh was half a mile away. I had the trap already set an' I jest sneaked off in the brush with my hawss an' waited. How d'yuh like it?"

Rand, his brain whirling, was trying to identify that voice. What phan-

tom had he been pursuing? That voice—he had heard it before—that whine. . . . But no— It *must* be Slug Bisbee's voice.

The phantom was speaking again and at the same time drawing a six-shooter from the holster at his side. "I reckon, jest tuh make shore that yuh don't git away an' foller me any farther," the tantalizing voice went on, "I'll put a slug in yore stubborn head. An' it'll be a forty-one slug, too. Cuss yuh, Darnell, I might have known that yuh'd foller me tuh hell. An' this is all—for you."

He raised the gun and Rand chilled. He was not afraid of death, but this was worse than death. He was an animal in a trap about to be killed without a chance.

And then another voice boomed. "Hands up!"

With a gurgling grunt of surprise, the phantom whirled. Rand, watching with fixed eyes, could see only the form above. But he knew that other voice. . . . Buzz Bisbee. The old gunman was there. Hope flooded through Rand, only to be smothered by cold reason.

Buzz Bisbee would never kill his brother merely to save the life of Rand Darnell. He would not. . . . Even as those thoughts were streaking through his head, the deed was done.

Rand saw the phantom throw up his gun to fire. But before it spoke, a bullet swept down with a roar, tearing through his chest. He lifted and clawed at the air, his gun exploding in his hands; then fell, rolling down the slope to the brink of the pool. . . .

A moment later Buzz Bisbee, as silent as ever, inserted his big bulk in the narrow slit and, with a branch, eased open the jaws of the trap.

Another moment and they were standing beside the body of the fallen man, who now lay face down. In dress he was Slug Bisbee, the brother of the man who had fired the death shot.

Rand looked at the big, silent gunman. "Yuh killed—yore—

But Bisbee stooped and rolled the body over. In the faint glow of twilight, Rand gazed down, his eyes widening. The glazing eyes and pallid features of Chuck Mitchell, the mine paymaster, lay before him.

"My brother was that—that—was what we found on that pile of burned brush back there on the trail," Bisbee said slowly, and grief now melted the hardness of his face. "I was suspicious when I examined Mitchell's hawss an' found that the bullet hole went clear through the wood. Furthermore, the tap was scorched by powder fire, showin' that it wasn't a spent bullet. I was positive of it when I found that tree that a bullet had been dug from. An' then there wasn't any sense in a murderer burnin' his victim's body right beside a road, after the horse had got away. It looked too much like a fake. An' leavin' Slug's hat with the blood on it in plain sight on the trail was another blind tuh hang it on the boy.

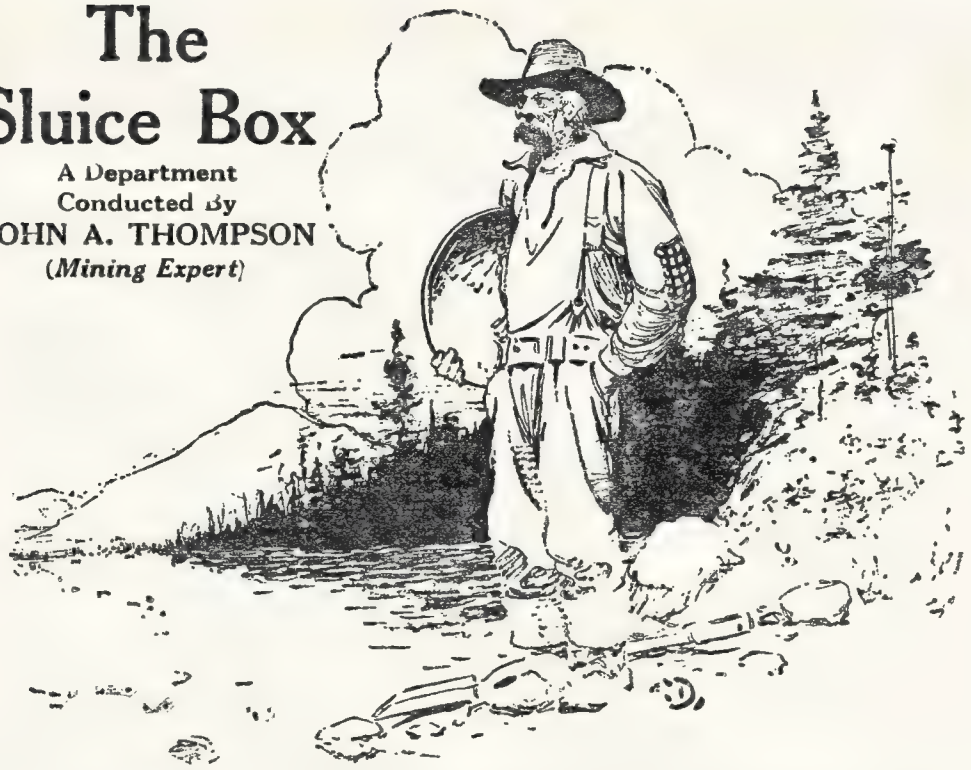
"This Mitchell skunk met Slug on the road. They stopped tuh palaver, most likely. Mitchell killed Slug, smeared blood on the riggin' of his own horse, and then took Slug's gun an' shot a hole in the stirrup. Then he likely fired a second bullet intuh the mesquite tree, dug out the lead with a knife an' planted it in the stirrup, an' high-tailed the horse for home.

"He changed clothes an' burned Slug's body so nobody could identify him, figgerin' tuh put the blame on a dead man.

"I wanted the satisfaction of killin' this tarantula with my own hands. That's why I tied yuh up back there. But yo're so danged stubborn yuh near milled things up. I sighted Mitchell hidin' in the tules above the water hole an' was stalkin' him slow an' careful while you was gittin' yoreself caught in his trap. Lucky he didn't know there was two of us."

The Sluice Box

A Department
Conducted by
JOHN A. THOMPSON
(*Mining Expert*)



THIS department is intended to be of real interest and practical assistance to all readers of ACE-HIGH MAGAZINE. It is conducted by the well-known John A. Thompson, mining expert. In each issue will be published some interesting facts concerning the various phases of prospecting and mining, based on John A. Thompson's many years of actual experience in the West and in Alaska. Prospecting problems and procedure will be discussed regularly. Also, questions relating to mining laws, field conditions, new and old mining territories, and so forth, will be answered in this department. If you wish a personal answer, enclose a stamped, self-addressed envelope with your question. Address all questions to John A. Thompson, Mining Expert, care of ACE-HIGH MAGAZINE, 155 East 44th St., New York, N. Y.

No. 104. Miner's Delight

MINER'S Delight!

There's a name for Sluice Box fans to roll around their tongues. A name to remember: Miner's Delight. Sounds like the name of a plug of chewin' tobacco. Or the name of a good, old-fashioned, hell-for-leather frontier honkytonk.

As a matter of fact, it is a ghost town. A little place in the shade of the South Pass across the Continental Divide that was hot-cha in its heyday. They mined and milled gold there once. They are apt to do it again.

Sooner or later the new gold fever that is sweeping the old gold-mining regions of the West will discover Miner's Delight. Then watch for excitement, thrills, and a revival of an early source of the rich yellow metal.

Arizona, California, Nevada, Colorado, Idaho, Utah, Montana—they have all been getting their share of the new publicity given gold mining. So have Washington, Oregon, and New Mexico. But what about Wyoming and the gravels of the Sweetwater, Wind River, and the Popo Agie? That was gold country once upon a time. It is likely to prove gold country again. And it is there that you can hunt up the remains of Miner's Delight.

There are other old mining camps there, too; South Pass City, Atlantic

City, Lander not far from the Popo Agie. They are accessible in a light car, a fairly important factor in these modern days of gas-buggie transportation. You can follow United States Highway 20 westward through Casper to Shoshoni and the Wind River canyon, then turn south on 320 past Riverton, Arapahoe and Hudson to Lander, double back to Dallas and there's a little old dirt road over the South Pass to Big Sandy Creek that goes through Atlantic City and South Pass City. From Cheyenne take United States Highway 30 to Rawlins, then north on 87 forty-six miles, without so much as a wide spot in the road, to Muddy Gap. Then 87 W to Dallas, and the same dirt road again.

The Atlantic mining district has produced anywhere from two to six million in gold bullion. Accurate figures are difficult, if not impossible, to obtain because, particularly in the earlier days, many individuals and small groups took out stakes, some of them sizable, on which no records were kept. A lot of the old-timers were mighty private about their own business. The size of their pokes was something they seldom talked about. No use encouraging road agents, footpads and the forerunners of the gangster, who were with us even before the Volstead era of machine-gun banditry. Also, there have always been tax collectors, and the memory of man knoweth not to the contrary. Consequently, such records as were kept hardly do justice to the full gold output of the district.

The Atlantic district consisted largely of lode gold. The district itself is in the southern part of Fremont County, Wyoming. The boys who like high altitudes ought to do well there. Down at Lander, about twenty miles away, you're just about a mile above sea level. The climb to Atlantic City—no connection with the beach resort in New Jersey, except that both have had their share of gold-diggers—takes you to 7,683 feet. South Pass City, a few miles farther on, is 7,803 feet above sea level. (United States Geological Survey figures used throughout) and Miner's Delight lies about three and a half miles north and east. South Pass itself is ten miles above, or southwest, of South Pass City. Great country for the fellow who loves his mountains.

Timber, or rather the lack of it, was one of the drawbacks to deep development of the lode gold properties in the early days. Little or no mine timber was available locally, and importing it over the old wagon roads was prohibitively expensive. However, there is plenty of firewood for camp and cooking; nut pine, jack pine, and aspen mostly. Down in the foothill region of the Wild Mountain range there is fine dry land grass for stock grazing, most of which is now utilized by stockmen.

Discovery of gold along the Sweetwater's upper reaches is said to date back to 1842, which puts Wyoming ahead of the California boom of '49. In fact, discovery was too previous; folks didn't pay much attention to it. But in 1855, with the nation still gold mad over the California bononzas, a party of forty, including the original discoverer, tackled the Sweetwater. They would have done better but for the hostile Indians who interfered with the prospecting and massacred most of the party.

Yet a few dauntless whites sluiced the Sweetwater in 1860, one eye on the gold collecting in the riffles and the other on the watch for red men. Placer mining began on Strawberry Creek in 1861. Winter of that year found some fifty rough and ready pioneers sitting around camp, swapping yarns, boasting, and waiting for spring to begin their mining.

Again the war-whoops of the Arapahoes disturbed the quiet, and prospecting was perforce given up, not always successfully, for the more im-

portant business of attending to the preservation of life and limb. Prospectors are persistent, however; they have to be to get results. In 1866 they were back again. On June 8th, 1867, the great Carissa lode was discovered by H. S. Reedall. Here was something worth holding to the last ditch. The Indians did their stuff, copped three scalps, and chased the whites down the mountain. Once more the prospectors came back. This time, in a short while, they managed, by crushing the rich quartz rock in a hand mortar and panning the dust, to clean up some nine thousand dollars, tangible proof that they had struck a region rich in gold.

The rush was on. First five hundred hardy souls piled up to South Pass City; then two thousand. Obviously, crushing rock a few pounds at a time in a small iron mortar was both slow and inefficient. Plans were laid for erecting the first stamp mill in the district, a crude contraption of six heavy stamps powered by an overshot water-wheel. Hermit Gulch was the site chosen for this innovation in frontier mining machinery.

The mill was built, and it worked. On July 20th, 1868, the mill opened for business. By November 1st, or in about three months and ten days, its noisy clang-banging stamps had powdered over a thousand tons of ore, averaging pretty nearly forty dollars a ton in recovered gold. Not bad at all. The ore came mainly from the Carissa lode, though some was brought in from Atlantic City. Then came winter and the mill shut down. It opened up in the spring, and the ore seemed even better than that handled the previous fall. Nearly fifty dollars per ton was its average gold content.

The first mill, being the only one in the district, had a real monopoly. Obviously, from the standpoint of the mill owners, it was a happy situation. And like many happy situations, it was too good to last.

Miner's Delight decided on having a mill of its own, a bigger and better plant than the six-stamp water-wheel contraption at Hermit Gulch. In six months the smack, roar, crash, and thump of Miner's Delight's ten-stamper, driven by a forty horsepower steam engine, crushed some sixty thousand dollars worth of gold from rock in the Miner's Delight lode. This brought a third mill into the district.

This also profited. More mills were built; it was a sort of reckless over-expansion that went on. The first thing folks knew, there were twelve mills pounding away in the district with a total of 161 stamps—and not enough bonanza rock to go around.

For one thing, the rich high-grade, easily reached, was pretty well used up. For another, miners and prospectors had been turning their attention to placers. Sluicing was much simpler; it eliminated milling charges, and a man could make his clean-ups himself.

Some of the placer gold ground that was opened up included Carissa Gulch, a tributary of Willow Creek; Big Atlantic, and Smith and Promise gulches, tributaries of Rock Creek. Rock Creek itself, near Atlantic City, yielded placer gold. Yankee and Meadow gulches across the Beaver Creek Divide produced gold for the prospector. These areas are mentioned in detail, for they provide a nucleus of definite locations from which placer prospecting might again be carried on.

When the easy-money placers began to get cleaned out, the early miners drifted elsewhere. It was a fortune or nothing they wanted in those days. They weren't looking for one and two and three dollar a day stuff. That would hardly keep them in tobacco, let alone liquid refreshment. South Pass City began to decline. For a while three mines remained active at Miner's Delight. But, by and large, gold mining along the upper reaches of the Sweetwater fell pretty flat.

In a considerable measure, develop-

ment of the gold lodes around Miner's Delight, South Pass City, and Atlantic City suffered from a fault in mine management that is more or less common even today. It is a regrettable truth, but none the less a fact, that when money for opening a mine is raised by stock selling or subscription, there is a frequent tendency on the part of the officers of the company to draw out of the treasury large sums in salaries and other expenses instead of putting every penny available directly into work on the mine. Also, superintendents way out in the hills, far from the city offices, are sometimes inclined to live high, wide and handsome on the company's funds.

Another perhaps less reprehensible, but none the less real, mistake that the developers of mining property often make, is that of being carried away by the desire to pay high dividends at the outset. It makes the property look good on paper, increases stock values and stock worth temporarily. But in the long run it generally cripples the mine by drawing out, in dividends, funds that had better be left in the treasury for subsequent development and extension of the mine workings.

In the Atlantic district, gold lodes suffered from all of the above abuses, or from some of them in many instances. An added factor of distress arose when it was discovered that the free-milling gold did not continue indefinitely at depth. The character of the ore changed to sulphide lower down, and to recover the gold more complicated metallurgy than mere stamping and amalgamating was required. Few of the mines had reserves to invest in the comparatively expensive cyaniding equipment. Cyaniding was more or less experimental then anyhow. Some of the plants that were put up weren't much good.

Flotation, which may mean the revival of some of those gold lodes, had yet to be heard from. So activity at Miner's Delight dwindled. One by one the mills closed down, although at least one or two have generally been kept in working condition so as to be ready and able to handle, on a custom basis, any small lots of ore mined by the companies or individuals that carried on.

There is plenty in favor of the gold properties at Miner's Delight, evidence that points to an ultimate resumption of activity there. It has been generally agreed upon by geologists and scientists that the gold veins of the district are of deep-seated origin, which means that geological conditions indicate that they will continue far, far into the ground.

The ore that the old-timers mined and milled ran from perhaps ten dollars to two hundred dollars a ton—say, a forty dollar average to be on the safe side. It is not unlikely that ore at fifteen dollars a ton can be found in the district today.

While the experts seem to believe in the physical persistence of the veins, the practical question from the miner's viewpoint is, do they carry gold values at depth? Of course, no one can guarantee the answer to that. That's what puts the gamble, the hazard, and not a little of the fascination into mining. Large veins seldom carry values uniformly. Some values may be scattered throughout the vein gangue. But the richer stuff is apt to be found bunched together in what are known as "pay shoots." In veins of deep-seated origin, conceded to extend more or less indefinitely into the ground, you are very likely to run out of one pay shoot—and perhaps just as likely to run into another—after working through a relatively lean section.

Of course, if you miss a pay shoot you can go on through the lean stuff until you are broke. And the next man may do the same, unless his guess or his judgment, often a subtle sixth sense rather than anything based on reasoning, leads him to cut and delve

in a different direction and so strike a new pay shoot. I know of cases where half a dozen men have worked on a gold lode hunting a lost pay shoot. One after another gave up in disgust, only to have the seventh come along and break into the new shoot with a few shots of powder or a few days' work. It is uncanny. Call it luck or fate or what you will, it does happen.

Scarcity of timber suitable for mine supports has already been mentioned as a difficulty in the development of deep mining around Miner's Delight. The curtailment of water flow throughout the frozen winter months is another drawback. But these are physical difficulties that may be overcome. Methods of mining may be used that require but little timbering. Reservoirs may be established to catch and save water. If necessary, steam pipes can be used to keep the water from freezing.

The great and highly important feature is that in all probability the well-defined and prominent large gold-bearing veins, like the Carissa and the Miner's Delight, extend more or less indefinitely into the bowels of the earth. A few of the smaller veins may pinch out at depth, but from the geological evidences it is not very probable that the big ones do.

Further, while there are no irrefutable arguments to back the belief that the gold content of these great veins will become richer at depth, neither is there any particular reason to believe that the values so far found and recovered are limited to the upper portion of the vein.

As to the placers of the general region, it is worth remarking that the richer gravels found around Atlantic City and Lewiston generally occurred in shallow draws heading into ground crossed by the big veins of the gold lodes. These placers in the past were of comparatively small extent, but rich. And the gold was easy to get at.

Here are two more localities you might look up: Smith Gulch, east of Atlantic City, and Dutch Tom Flats. Around Lewiston the placer gold has been coarse for the most part.

Two-ounce nuggets were not uncommon in the Lewiston placers in the old days, and the heaviness of the gold particles made the ground a fine thing for pan or sluice box. It was easy to save the yellow metal. Furthermore, the gold from this part of the country is in most cases a bright, deep yellow. A nugget would stand out plainly.

Rock Creek, two miles below Atlantic City, has contributed its share of placer gold production for the district.

They report a funny story concerning the placers along Red Canyon. It appears that some time ago a group bought up all the land along the creek bottom. They couldn't stake it because it was owned by some prosperous ranchers and stockmen. After the enterprising mining company obtained their land and began large scale placer operations, they found the thing was a dud. Operating expenses and initial cost of the property were probably too high. It looked as if another mining venture was going to wind up with the results in red ink. Then somebody had a bright idea. The creek bottom lands were cut up and sold for farms; garden truck, fruit, and alfalfa production being the specialties. And it is said that the mining company came out ahead in the deal after all.

Maybe some of those farmers are down panning the creek now for a chance to get some real "farm relief." There ought to be spots along the canyon where at least a little return in gold could be had for some careful prospecting and industrious shovel work.

There are other and broader general placer sections in this part of the country, namely, along the bigger streams such as Wind River, the Popo

Agie, the Bighorn and the Sweetwater. Part of this Wind River area lies in the Shoshone Indian Reservation. While prospecting on Indians lands is frequently restricted, or granted by permission of the Reservation Agent, only in the case of the Wind River Reservation was it formally declared by proclamation and an Act of Congress that, "Lands ceded to the United States under said agreement shall be disposed of under the provisions of the homestead, townsite, coal and mineral land laws of the United States and shall be opened to settlement and entry."

Then, further, relating to mining claims, the Act declares that, "Notice of location of all mineral entries shall be filed in the local land office of the district in which the lands covered by the location are situated, and unless entry and payment shall be made within three years from the date of location all rights thereunder cease."

The Wind River Mountains themselves are a high and rugged range. The deposits of placer gravel lie down along the lower flats formed by terraces and bars along the streams. Old stream gravels may cap benches or present buttes far from the present course of the stream which originally deposited them in their present position. Placer gravels have been found more than ten miles from the present water course. The average thickness of these gravels is about twelve feet. In places, however, they may be piled up much thicker, sometimes as much as a hundred feet deep.

The deposits are composed for the most part of water-worn pebbles of mixed sizes, showing little or no separation into layers by the stream and indicating a rather rapid deposition by a swift mountain current. Nature didn't get much chance to sort out the gravels. Granite, quartz, slate pebbles, clay and sand are all mixed up; and what gold there is is somewhere in the heap—finely scattered, seldom sufficiently concentrated by Nature to afford profitable working, except where rich pockets or streaks may be struck.

There is fine gold, difficult to save in sluices, southwest of Arapahoe on the Popo Agie. To add to the difficulties of washing the gold clean, abundant heavy iron sands tend to clog the riffles and float the fine gold away to be lost again in the tailing pile.

Wind River, between Lenore and Riverton, has been fairly good for placering, though the gold occurs irregularly and, as a rule, the general run of colors is somewhat smaller than a pinhead. Tough stuff to save. It has been estimated that about 350 of these pinhead colors are required to equal one cent in value, which will give you some idea of how fine they are.

But back at Miner's Delight, at South Pass City, and at Atlantic City, those mills may clatter and pound again when the boys who haven't forgotten this corner of Wyoming in its former golden glory reawaken those ghost towns once full of hardy pioneers.

AUSTRALIA READS THE SLUICE BOX, TOO. "I am writing from far off Australia. I read the Sluice Box with interest and have learned a lot of things I never knew before. I am a prospector in West Australia and have worked several claims with a fair amount of success. I have been working my present claim for seven years. It is a mile out of the township of Meekatharra, a town with a population of about 800.

"The line of the lode here is two miles long, and the three principal mines are the Consoles, Finian, and Marmont. These mines are on forty-eight acres of ground and have turned out since 1907 over 1,000,000 ounces of gold. . . . The State Government runs a small five-head battery for the local prospectors and charges eight

shillings and sixpence per hour. . . . Wiluna is east of here and is treating about 4,000 tons a month. The management is all American. I don't fancy Wiluna at all. Your President, Mr. Hoover, was here in the early days as manager of the Queen of the Hills, which is now worked by a friend of mine. . . .

"I am thirty-three years of age and had four years with A. I. F. in Egypt and France and have been all over Australia. Jack Mann, Meekatharra, Western Australia, Australia."

Write us again some time, Mr. Mann.

THANK YOU, MR. BAILEY. Here's an ACE-HIGH reader who winds up his letter with a good tip for other Sluice Box fans to follow.

"Just wanted to thank you for your personal reply to my recent letter regarding the question about the Peg Leg Lost Mine. Today I read of a new discovery of a similar old mine, headed EL REY GOLD MINE LOST TWO CENTURIES IS FOUND BY DOG. The story from Tucson, Arizona, stated:

> The famous El Rey Gold Mine, lost for more than two centuries, has been found because a dog chased a rabbit into an ancient hillside mining shaft. The dog owner, C. B. Trott, and a party of hunters entered the shaft and discovered a veritable treasure of old manuscripts, some of which bore the date of 1672. Apparently more than a million dollars in gold was taken from the mine to the viceroy at Mexico City in the early days of Spanish domination. Remains of a primitive ore mill were found near the mouth of the hundred-foot shaft.

"Which all goes to strengthen a fellow's faith in the possibility of truth in the Peg Leg Lost Mine stories. I hope to find it some day.

"Mining and prospecting are about the most interesting things that take place in my life. As a side line and a hobby, I make complete photographic records of all my trips and dealings at any mine and make albums. I cut out all news items, like the above, or anything about mines and mining that is interesting and have them mounted among my collection of pictures.

"I also make bound books of the Sluice Box Department in ACE-HIGH and carefully file them away for future reference, properly indexed."

Here's a little first-hand information from the Montana mining country:

"I often read the Sluice Box department in ACE-HIGH. I attended a big miner's meeting last year out here. Unemployment has caused a lot of men to start washing some of the bars here adjacent to the headwaters of the Missouri. They only make fair wages. But the A. C. M. Company is hot under the collar. A lot of young bucks have been washing gold on some idle land of theirs. The company has them ousted, but little good that does. The young chaps just move on to another place and are ousted again. They move gleefully on from one location of the company's holdings to another, and the rest of the country is holding its sides laughing. Pink Simms, Great Falls, Montana."

DENVER GOLD—*Is it still possible to pan gold in the vicinity of Denver? J. B. Todd, Clearwater, Florida.*

Ans. Yes. For two summers many men have lined the South Platte with sluice boxes and gold pans. It is doubtful if many bonanzas were struck, but the majority gleaned enough of the precious yellow metal to earn a living at it.

The local authorities even started prospecting schools. Last year an Associated Press despatch dated at Denver stated that, "Chiefly as a measure to relieve unemployment, several Colorado cities are conducting schools for gold diggers. The latest opened in Denver under the auspices of Mayor George D. Begole,

the Vocational Training Department, and mining men.

"With half a dozen experienced placer miners in charge, forty sluice boxes have been installed in the South Platte River within the city limits and within a few hundred feet of the spot where gold was first discovered in 1858 by W. Green Russell and his party of Georgia and Cherokee miners.

"Almost continuously since the first discovery, these sands have been worked every summer and spring by miners with gold pan and sluice box, who have reported making from $1.50 to $2 a day."

OCEAN GOLD—*Have been enjoying the mining articles in ACE-HIGH since I first started reading the magazine two years ago. Maybe the question I would like to have answered is outside your department, but here it is: is there really gold in sea water? And how much? B. J. Tancer, Rome, New York.*

Ans. Yes. Some scientist with a passion for figures and statistics recently estimated that there are anywhere from 23 to 1,200 tons—yep, tons—of gold in a cubic mile of ocean. That's a lot of gold. And a lot of ocean. The smaller amounts of gold are in the shallower coastal waters, the higher values in the deep seas. With gold worth, roughly, $540,000 a ton, this would make the gold content of a square mile of sea water worth anywhere from $12,500,000 to about $665,000,000. And with figures such as those for a selling talk, it is small wonder that men have promoted companies to extract commercially the gold value from sea water. There is nothing wrong with the idea. But when it comes to the execution—try and do it. Extracting the gold on a feasible, commercial scale is still an unsolved problem.

PRIVATE LAND — *Could you please inform me as to whether a man can work a gold placer on a river where it runs through private land? Lewis Rollins, Waterloo, Montana.*

Ans. Not without the consent of, or by agreement with the owner of the land.

Do You Know Your SLUICE BOX?

1—In what state is the old gold camp of Miner's Delight?

2—Are the gold-bearing veins there believed to be of deep-seated origin?

3—What frontier hazard for a long time delayed gold-mining in the Miner's Delight section?

4—Is there much timber suitable for deep-mining purposes in the neighborhood of the gold lodes around Miner's Delight?

5—What is one important drawback in the character of the placer gold along the Wind River gravels?

(The answers to these questions will be printed in the next issue of ACE-HIGH MAGAZINE.)

Answers to Questions in October Issue

1—British Columbia has both lode and placer gold deposits. 2—Glacial action frequently gouges the accumulated gold placers out of the valleys down which the ice sheet flows. 3—Quartz adhering to gold particles recovered in a placer generally indicates that the source of the gold is not far away. 4—Flour gold may have traveled a long distance from its source. 5—The big stampede to the Klondike drew many of the early prospectors in northern British Columbia away from their diggings.

THE stories of many of these gold strikes read like fiction. Next month's article is no exception. You can't afford to miss the description of a famous Oregon strike in the next issue of ACE-HIGH MAGAZINE.

John C. Thompson

A GET-TOGETHER DEPARTMENT FOR
GENERAL SERVICE TO OUR READERS
Conducted by The Storekeeper

THE BARGAIN COUNTER

If you want to exchange something you have, but don't want, for something you want that someone else has, here is the place to do it. It must be understood that ACE-HIGH MAGAZINE *cannot be held responsible for losses sustained by our readers.*

Announcements inserted free of charge, but they must not exceed 21 words inclusive of name and address, and must be either typed or hand-printed. Nothing but BONA FIDE trades acceptable; announcements of articles for sale will be ignored. State both what you have and what you want. Study examples of announcements in this issue for the proper way to draft yours.

The United States Government prohibits mailing of firearms capable of being concealed on the person, therefore, swaps of revolvers, pistols, etc., will not be published in "The Bargain Counter."

Want to swap stamps or coins. Want Washington series, also high values, dues and commemoratives. E. Jahnke, 219 E. 8th St., Flint, Mich.

Want musical instruments, guitars, banjos and ukes preferred. Have variety list. Tom Hirz, 135 Ryerson Ave., Paterson, N. J.

Have 50 good arrowheads, all sizes. Want saxophone, typewriter, modern guns or large accordion. Modern Shoe Shop, Keokuk, Iowa.

Want binoculars, musical instruments, guns, cameras, relics. Have 110-190 volt DC dynamic speaker, .12 ga. pumpgun. C. I. Wagner, Wayland, Iowa.

Want radio books, manuals, magazines and a good Underwood typewriter, latest model. What do you want? T. Douthat, Box 127, Pulaski, Va.

Want Remington automatic. Have everything to trade. No junk. E. Carpenter, 831 E. Gum St., Evansville, Ind.

Have Savage rifle, .22 long, leather brief case, traveling bag. Want watches, discarded jewelry, chains, rings, or? F. Beacom, Pierre, S. Dak.

Will trade fur and taxidermy work, mounted specimens, for guns, typewriter, outdoor books, cartridge and wood collections, or? E. Dunga, Maeser Fur Farm, Hackensack, Minn.

Have thousands of arrowheads, birdpoints, axes, pipes, boatstones, war points, spears. Want guns, coins. H. L. Talburt, Calico Rock, Ark.

Have .38-55 Steven target rifle, dynamic speaker, 8x field glasses, 8 day winding watch, Gladstone bag, new. Want offers. Max Belz, Waldoboro, Me.

Want bicycle, Winchester pumpgun, .12 ga., violin case. Have several articles, books, magazines, etc. E. Cable, West Manchester, O.

Have good doctor books, health books, magazines, deerskin, also large list. Want stamp collection, or what? J. G. Buck, 3230 So. Lime St., Chicago, Ill.

Will trade Oliver typewriter, perfect condition, for small portable typewriter. Will exchange lists. M. Sinnott, Box 52, Rockland, Dela.

Want Indian head pennies. Have large list. Write what you want? C. G. Kroll, 1732 W. 14th Pl., Chicago, Ill.

Tear off this slip and mail it with your announcement—it entitles you to one *free* insertion in this Department. Announcements are published as soon as possible and in the order of their receipt. Announcements are limited to 21 words—trades only—no others considered. Announcements must be either typed or hand-printed. Mail them to The Storekeeper, ACE-HIGH MAGAZINE, 155 E. 44th St., New York, N. Y.

Name.....

Street.....

City.....

(Void after November 4, 1932)

25 different foreign stamps for 5 Indian head pennies. Send 50 stamps and receive 50 different. Returns mailed at once. E. Staggers, 10532 Elgin Ave., Cleveland, O.

Send 5 or more good French photos and receive 5 or more magazines State kind wanted. W. Williams, 816 Lyons St., Lake Charles, La.

Want printing presses and supplies. Have stamps to trade. Write. Orren Krause, Box 61, Harbor Beach, Mich.

Have unused I. C. S. showcard course, horsehide coat, 84, new, loose-leaf price books. Want guns, blankets, air bed, compass, 9½' bamboo rod, or? Poe, 4481 Forest Park, St. Louis, Mo.

Aviation course in Chicago, transferable to electricity course. Want good radio, shortwave, televisor, car, or? H. Long, Cole Ave., Wheaton, Ill.

Want guns, binoculars. Have trades of value. Remsen, 769 Hunterdon St., Newark, N. J.

Have brand new Spaulding basketball and football, high value. Want bicycle. Answer quickly. Elmer Falk, 478—58th St., Brooklyn, N Y.

Will trade anything for printing press and supplies. Also mail order goods wanted. L. Ryan, 5804—14th N. W., Seattle, Wash.

Want binoculars or field glasses, 8 power, or more in good condition. Have 80 magazines mostly COWBOY STORIES, camera, German .22 rifle. Bramlett, Box 93, La Grange, Calif.

Have army frank stamps, clear lots cheap, Hawaiian seed necklaces. Want Geographics, Underwood typewriter, stamps, or? Sinclaire, Box 1807. Los Angeles, Calif.

Offer air covers, magazines, boys' books, SW converter, needs rewiring, for art photos. Hal R. Doolittle, Box 113, Allenhurst, N. J.

Want Austin, delivered. Have 10 ft. sport plane fuselage, motorbike, 6 ft. boat, cabinet victrola, radios, motor, toy electric auto. R. Becker, 4 Barnard, Poughkeepsie, N. Y

Want carpentry tools, etc. Have magazines, also large-sized chemical set with many extras. R. Simmons, 70 Mt. Pleasant Ave., Troy, N Y.

Will trade one Canadian nickel for every Indian head cent dated 1909 sent me. F. Neill, Rear St., Campbellford, Ont., Canada.

Want French Art, Paris Nights, crystal ball, United coupons. Have 8x10 movie photos, movie magazines, postcards. A. Gill, Box 52, Mexia, Tex.

17 vols. Encyclopedia Britannica, old coins, rabbits, motors, document signed by President Wilson. Want motorcycle. R. Eschinger, 1929 Pa. Ave. N. W., Washington, D. C.

Have U. S. navy manual, cobra snakeskin, books, etc. Want microscope or military equipment. H. Lakow, 1637—78th St., Brooklyn, N Y

Swap books for stamps, stamps for stamps. Wm. J. Eskler, 833 E. Pine St., Mahanoy City, Pa.

Have typewriter, ice-skates, bicycle parts. 200 name cards. Want Indian relics, swords, bayonets, guns. E. Goodman, 718 Wheeler Ave., Scranton, Pa.

Want 8x5 press. Have mineral, 800 stamps, paintings, m. o. propositions, dictionary. A. Korda, 24 South, Franklin, N. J.

Want automatic shotgun, tent, camping equipment, army clothing, canteen, gasoline flatiron, for? Your list for mine. L. Crater, R. 2, Manatee, Fla.

Want portable short-wave receiver television kit, pocket radio kit, headphones. Have relics, guns. Owens, Calhoun, Ky.

Will swap boxing gloves, tubes, skates with guards, new football, helmet and shoes. Want press and type. Send for list. R. Rosenberger, 53 W. Colorado St., St. Paul, Minn.

100 different stamps for ten unused U. S. one centers, unused Kansas overprints for? Have philosophy and new thought books A. C Kriesel, Hoisington, Kans.

Will exchange foreign stamps for U. S. mint and first day covers. Send what you have. E Lightbody, 303 W. Willow, Chippewa Falls, Wis.

Words to old-time songs, coins, watches and magazines, for coins, or what have you? Norris Woldy, Sarles, N. Dak.

Will give 100 different U. S. stamps for each large copper cent I receive before 1800. E. M. Lundskow, 5041—30th Ave., Kenosha, Wis.

Have tattooing outfits, swap for large tent, 10x15 ft., or larger, typewriter, swords. J. Verba, 15014 Edgewood Ave., Cleveland, O.

Scott's 20th century album, part one, good condition. Best offer in mint U S. takes it. F. E. Millington, 200 E. 11th St., Hays, Kans.

¾ h. p. general electric, direct current motor, 115 volt, speed 1800, with rheostat. Want 9x12 rug or typewriter L. C. Fuller, Waterville, Me.

Have 1842 Mexican dollar, arrowheads, sword, old gun. Want antique S. and W. .22, etc. R. E. Sawyers, R. 4, Covington, Tenn.

Trade cowboy hat, good shape, size 6⅞, for tattooing outfit, or flintlock rifle. Bob Washburn, Ft. Bayard, N. Mex.

Have many valuable articles to swap for a bulldog, bicycle, radio tubes, instruments, drugs or livestock remedies. L. E. Sceli, 1847 E. Walnut St., Des Moines, Iowa.

Have tenor banjo, drum set, seashells, guns, etc. Want typewriter, .38-40 rifle, or what? Jack Green, Port Aransas, Tex.

Want Sharp's .45-120-150, or other heavy rifle. Have .25-30 repeater, radio courses and parts, magazines, or? H. L. Lindsley, R. 1, Constantine, Mich.

Have photos, deerfoot knives, cigarette cases, novelties, magazines. Want art photos, athletic photos, old Police Gazettes. Gilmour, Billboard, 251 W. 42nd St., New York City.

Have two wrist watches. Want old and new guns. E. M. Cassel, 421 Reid Bldg., Detroit, Mich.

Portable typewriter, hammerless shotgun, repeating rifles, electric grinder, violin, jewelry. Want automatics, coins, stamps. J. Edmundoz, Box 126, Zolfo Springs, Fla.

Coins exchanged for stamps and covers. H. N. Martinsen, 41-45 Sixty-third St., Woodside, L. I., N. Y.

Have doctor's prescription book, blow torch, Eastman kodak and tools. What is offered? E. Bentley, 85 Marshall St., Paterson, N. J.

Have typewriter, microphones, AC phonograph, Paasche air brush, battery radio, amplifiers. Want volt meters, milliammeters. Perry, Anniston, Ala.

Parts for Krags, Ross and Springfields, for what have you? Thomas A. Greeley, 67 Palm St., Newark, N. J.

Trade a fine cello for Gibson guitar, L3 or L4, or Gibson tenor banjo, Bd clarinet, Albert system for drum set. J. L. Bogle, 412 N W. 7th St., Fairfield, Ill.

Want swords, daggers, old or odd firearms, old flintlock musket or rifle. Will swap old guns, swords, old coins, 500 magazines, radio Goulding, Box 543, Eustis, Fla.

Have 175 magazines, ACE-HIGHS, detective, etc. Want 10-20 power binoculars or 100-200 microscope, or? Trade magazines. J. Kranz, 374—45th St., Brooklyn, N. Y.

Want hand printing press. Have rabbits, camera, radio, magneto, Edison records, generators, new wrist watch. J. Van Gorden, 1333 S. Sugar St., Lima, Ohio.

Have 20 volumes "World's Greatest Books," like new. Want kodak, binoculars, or send list and offers. Indecki, 8215 Hammond St., Detroit, Mich.

Will give five good Western precancels for each bicentennial precancel sent me. Include postage. R. Conine, 132 A St., N. W., Ardmore, Okla.

100 genuine Indian grave wampum disc from California mound to exchange for 10 perfect bird arrows or U. S. commemorative half dollars. R. Smith, 817—48th St., Sacramento, Cal.

Send me 25, 50 or 100 stamps, any kind. I will return same amount. All letters answered. John J. Brearley, 82 Trask St., Providence, R. I.

Want photos, lady boxers, wrestlers, vaudeville acts, art, odd pictures, old Police Gazettes. Have same, books, etc. C. Guyette, c/o Billboard, 251 W. 42nd St., N. Y. C.

Let's swap stamps and first day covers. Send good only. E. L. Lehmer, 721 Herman Ave., Lemoyne, Pa.

Christmas cards, steel engraved, 1932 style, French folders, parchment etc. What is offered? J. Weiss, Box 18, Stapleton, N. Y.

Will give stamps cataloging $3 for every Scott's stamp catalog, air mail or precancel catalog sent me. No German stamps. R. K. Pitts, Jr., Bowden, Ga.

Have rabbits, cavies, guns, ships models, saber, tenor-banjo. Want guns, kodaks, carpenters' tools, microscope, typewriter. O. F. Rideout, 14 Suffolk St., Lynn, Mass.

Will give 100 Sweet William or Hardy Pink plants for every commemorative half dollar sent me. H. C. Lockhart, Shelly, Pa.

Exchange U. S. only, basis current Scott. Send a selection, honest, prompt returns. J. E. Toy, R. 2, Box 45, Waynesville, N. C.

Several fine pairs of Mexican mountain lion claws, trade for anything I can use. G. E. Porter, Box 166, Dilley, Tex.

Have Marsh's Thesaurus dictionary, maps, 1749-1816, Brunswick portable phonograph, foreign stamps, Indian relics, World War covers, for? D. Holmes, Luray, Va.

Want A eliminator or parts, B eliminator. Have magazines, radio parts, check protector. S. Storkson, Valley City, N. Dak.

Want printing press, cameras or 35mm. projector. Send description and state what you want. D. C. Evans, 103 E. North St., Tampa, Fla.

Best offer in stamps, no German, Austrian, Hungarian, takes Scott 1932 catalog, new. A. B. Derda, 2968 N. Ridgeway Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Will trade magazine subscriptions for profit-sharing coupons, coins, books. Make an offer. Write. J. J. Howard, Box 145, Wallins Creek, Ky.

Have nearly two hundred magazines to trade for magazines. Send your list for mine. W. McIntosh, Box 1, Rosenhayn, N. J.

Want first flights and dedications. Have many things to trade. R. Gooley, 3528 N. Lincoln Ave., Chicago, Ill.

What's wanted for .22 rifle, repeater or single, in good condition? Have most everything or can get it. J. Offermann, 105 Logan St., Brooklyn, N. Y.

Want 6x9 printing press, type, leads, rules, borders, etc. Get my list. O. Scandrette, Wessington Springs, S. Dak.

Have original paintings and sketches. Want cameras, .22 repeating rifle or archery supplies. Exchange lists. E. Clapper, Stop 68, Avon Lake, O.

Have rabbits, magazines, stamps, stamp album, boxing gloves. Want radio, motorcycle, Ford, coins, or? Eddie Pol, Box 266, Bantam, Conn.

Want 4x5 press, old novels, stamps. What do you want? G. W. Kibler, 123½ S. Raleigh St., Martinsburg, W. Va.

Want books, law, fiction, poetry, narratives, adventures, travels, etc. Have books, stamps, coins, etc. J. Kapsak, Sellersville, Pa.

Have thousands postmarks. Want stamps, or? J. Kneifel, 6540 No. Oak Park Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Am going West. Want cowboy boots, spurs. Make your offers. Have most anything. C. M. Criswell, 741 Tate St., Memphis, Tenn.

50 foreign stamps for every 100 U. S. commemoratives and air mails sent and South American stamps. C. A. Brown, Box 514, Vancouver, B. C., Canada.

Trade 1/6 h. p. Champion motor, camera and mess kit for Irish or English setter pup. A. Palermo, 10406 Leavitt St., Chicago, Ill.

Will swap 40 cacheted air mail covers for series 1928 two-dollar bill. R. C. Thompson, R. 2, Glen Allen, Va.

Trade Ithaca 10 ga. double hammer shotgun, pitted. Needs one firing pin. Want small bore gun. F. Miller, 211 No. Wash. St., Lockport, Ill.

Will trade magazine subscriptions for profit-sharing coupons, coins, books. Make an offer. Write. Jesse J. Howard, Box 145, Wallins Creek, Ky.

Pottery, stone, flint, Indian relics, ancient make, for cello or bass violin, high-grade guitar. H. G. Stubbs, Atkins, Ark.

Want outboard motor, AC short-wave converters, car radio. Have guns, watches, etc. K. W. Kinney, 1021 Teller Ave., Grand Junction, Colo.

Will trade Bosch B eliminator for set Milo barbells. N. Atony, Box 81, Bobtown, Pa.

105 different stamps for four three-cent unused Washington stamps, or 7 old pennies, 60 different. Chas. Spahr, 2972 N. 40th St., Milwaukee, Wis.

Want bolos kriss, daggers, spears, beheading knives, any edged weapons, Kentucky rifles, powder flasks, for? H. A. Campbell, 629 Third Ave., Dayton, Ky.

Different baggage label for every 4 precancels you send. Swap postcards. Coburn, 601 W. 141st St., N. Y. C.

Chinchilla rabbits for boxing, tumbling course, or? 8 different newspaper or 3 humorous magazines for 200 stamps, or? P. Vanecho, R. 4, St. Clairsville, O.

Mail clerk and carrier course, accordion, books, radio, parts, tubes. Want circular saws, guitar, mandolin, etc. Send list for mine. S. Mohler, Pomeroy, O.

Want courses in voice, religion, English, press, .12 ga. shotgun. Have ladies' and men's Elgin watches, coins, fountain pens, electrical library. West, Walkertown Sta., Hazard, Ky.

Postage stamps, paintings, viewcards of Esthonia and other countries for second-hand magazines and ukuleles, musical instruments. J. Lubi, Vene 4, Viljandi, Esthonia.

Have 6 volumes of "Pioneering and Woodcraft" by E. T. Seton, fine condition. Want 8X or 10X binoculars, or? A. W. Goff, 1251A No. 3rd, Milwaukee, Wis.

Have auto battery, .22 rifle and bicycle parts. Want anything pertaining to cartooning. Walter Cunningham, 1407 Madison St., Maywood, Ill.

Have 8X binoculars, portable phonograph, radio, h. d. motorcycle. Want riding gauntlets, leather blouse and pants, small car. F. Goodwin, Box 51, Swanton, Vt.

Want any U. S. stamps, revenues or postage that you have. What do you want? All answered. L. H. Wilson, 3103 Second Ave., Richmond, Va.

Want butterflies, moths, stamps, coins, arrowheads. Have stamps, magazines, butterflies, moths, cactus, etc. J. Hayes, 1905 N. Crawford Ave., Chicago, Ill.

First flight air mail and C. A. M. covers, to trade for airport dedication covers. W. A. Siegrist, 315 N. Severance, Hutchinson, Kans.

Have viewcards and foreign stamps and fishing goods. Want viewcards, etc. Milton Newman, 124 Nye Ave., Newark, N. J.

For each 25 U. S. commemoratives sent me, will send 50 precancels. C. C. Dargan, Maple St., Clinton, S. C.

Tattooing outfits, Kentucky rifle, 1773 brass-trimmed rifle, R. Johnson 1841 flintlock. Miller, 431 Main, Norfolk, Va.

Have Legion convention badges, model airplane building sets, books, etc. Exchange lists. F. J. Heckel, 407—17th St., Lincoln, Ill.

Have Underwood typewriter, Savage .22 repeater, .38-40 Marlin, V. P kodak. Want Graflex or Leica camera, or? P. Eidson, Box 101. Elkin, N. C.

Have many arrowheads, foreign and U. S. coins, rabbits, for Indian cents or U. S. stamps. All letters answered. J. P. Azlin, R 3, Siloam Springs, Ark.

Have typewriter, uke, printing press and camera for alto or tenor saxophone. W. Sparf, 618 S. Villa Ave., Villa Park, Ill.

Baseballs and glove, cable exercisers, silk dollars, tenor banjo, bugle, glassware and water set. Want offers. J. Alexandre, 221 Howard Ave., Brooklyn, N. Y.

Want Red Cross seals. What do you want? C. Burton, 1627—1st St. S. W., Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

For every 25 Indian pennies sent me, will send 12 different autographed movie star pictures. Arrie Gill, Box 52, Mexia, Tex.

Have good collection postcards, 78 unused, 91 used. What have you? O. J. Daugherty, 12400 Matherson Ave., Cleveland, O.

Have every kind of radio part, both transmitting and receiving. Want guitar or U. S. coins. W. J. Robertson, 15 N. Eldorado, Stockton, Calif.

Have tennis racquet, balls, press and case. Want cowboy boots, size 6, and hat. D. Knemeyer, 522 E. Lemon, Monrovia, Calif.

Have land, guns, violin, traps, books, magazines, chickens, jewelry, anglers' supplies fountain pens, lantern, games. Want most anything. C. A. Lay, Box 72, Marshall, Ark.

Have large stock of stamps to trade. Send your lists. All letters answered. Geo. Wm. Pollock, 706 Union Ave., Bronx, N. Y.

Send me 100 stamps, all different. I'll send you 100 of mine. Prompt reply. Archie C. Rankin, 924—36th St., Oakland, Calif.

Want .30-30 Winchester carbine, like new. Also slide trombone and Bb metal clarinet, like new. Harry L. Schmidt, Lake City, Minn.

Will trade postmarks for precancels, coins for old books on Heckwelder, Zinzendorf and Zieberger. C. W. Eckert, 718 High St., Bethlehem, Pa.

Trade what you want for old, odd, curious, guns, flintlocks, match locks, wheel locks. L. A. Wilson, 808 No. 6th, Springfield, Ill.

Have acousticon, slightly used. Restores hearing to deaf people. What am I offered? A. W. Smith, 130 N. Main, Marion, O.

Want good precancels, also good stamps. Have opals, minerals, coins, books, curios, fossils, Indian beadwork, gems. V. Lemley, Northbranch, Kans.

Want cameras, photo equipment. Have printing press, stamps, books, money-making formulas, or? J. W. Stotlemeyer, 448 Ella St., Wilkinsburg, Pa.

Airplane generator, brand new, typewriter, minerals. Want outboard motor, stamps, guns. Codding, 2503 E. 86th St., Cleveland, O.

Will give 200 different foreign coins, for 20 U. S. unused U. S. 10c stamps. Ralph Harris, Box 880, Pittsburgh, Pa.

10 Arikaree Indian relics, stone hammer, knives, scrapers, birdpoints, for silver dollar. F. Howell, Lynch, Nebr.

Have 32 volt generator. Want guns, or? G. A. Eggleston, Iroquois, S. Dak.

Drink habit absolutely cured. Write me. Clifford Fenton, Box 724, Omaha, Nebr.

Have watchmaking course, master keys, flexsole plastic leather, razor hone. Send your list. Answer all Want good watch, or? J. Podkranic, R. F. D. 2, Enumclaw, Wash

Land, north and south. Will trade for farm, city property or automobiles. G. Luckett, R. 1, Box 18, Ft. Myers, Fla.

Have relic rifle, good relic condition, not in firing order. Swap only for .30-06 Springfield. Norman Thomas, 1112 Lexington Ave., Greensboro, N. C.

Will give Remington automatic .22 rifle for each 1913 Liberty head nickel or 1894 mint dime. Want Indian motorcycle. D. F. Hamilton, E. Liberty, O.

Will give 30 different U S. stamps, including commemoratives for 5 Indian head pennies, send postage. M. Gold, 375 Clifton Pl., Brooklyn, N. Y.

Have movie camera, projector, and roll of film in good condition. Want banjo and guns, or coins. J. Kruslak, 1844 S. 61st St., Cicero, Ill.

Want black and tan terrier or cocker spaniel pup. Have stamps, coins, or what do you want? R. O. Hader, 2201—52nd St., Kenosha, Wis.

No. 1 Royal typewriter, radio parts, printing, for diamond, or? C. J. Penners, 421 Thomas St., St. Paul, Minn.

Want cameras, parts and photographic equipment, also 4x5 plate holders. Have wrist watch. can get anything. G. Pollock, 1341—45th St., Sacramento, Calif.

Want metal or celluloid horse car, trolley, bus, ferry, or bridge fare tokens. Have most anything you want. R. W. Dunn, 1839 S. Main St., Los Angeles, Calif.

Will send a formula for curing skin cancers and large hard bumps for twenty-five cents in stamps. G. Sanderfer, R. 3, Hattiesburg, Miss.

Have candy course, complete with tools, 12 volt generator, formulas, psychology course. Want typewriter, duplicator, etc. N. Givens, Mena, Ark.

Mining magazines wanted. Have books, magazines, mail order plans, schemes, formulas. G. Homer, 1305 W. Harrison St., Chicago, Ill.

Have collection 500 foreign stamps, coins, battery charger, books, etc. Want U. S. coins, stamps, lathe, etc. F. Sherwood, 2573 Albany St., Schenectady, N. Y.

Pottery, stone, and flint Indian relics, ancient make for cello or bass violin, high-grade guitar. H. G. Stubbs, Atkins, Ark.

Want dancing or muscle building course. Will send my list of trades to anyone. E. McCall, 606—12th St., Bismarck, N. D.

Horned frog, stone crabs, sea beans, oil paintings and others, for arrowheads, gemstones, or what? W. H. Head, Bay City, Tex.

Have magazines, No. 120 autographic folding camera, 7-j. Elgin wrist watch. Want .16 ga. Browning automatic, or? W. I. Shumate, Red Springs, Tex.

Will give one genuine U. S. small gold dollar for 17 U. S. unused 10c stamps. Ralph Harris, Box 880, Pittsburgh, Pa.

40 arrowheads and one stone. Want stamps or coins. J. F. Bond, Churchville, N. Y.

Trade 300 Western, detective and air magazines, for? D. F. Hamilton, East Liberty, O.

Have guns, Indian relics, books, magazines and large list. Send your list. J. B. Colburn, 424 Main St., Rapid City, S. Dak.

Printing, minerals, mineralogies, SW parts, traded for printers' supplies only. Want paper stock. J. Abbott, 2137 Centre Ave., Fort Lee, N. J.

Will trade stamps, precancels, postmarks, for same, or precancel for every stamp or two postmarks I retain. T. Noga, 50 Frederick Pk., Rochester, N. Y.

Have electric puffie machine. Trade for shotgun or .22 repeater. Collier R. 2, Box 711, Clayton, Mo.

Want a small printing press, printing supplies. Have many things to swap. My list for yours. D. T. Syfrett, Box 113, Lawton, Okla.

Want U. S. commemorative halves. Have old U. S. and foreign coins, books, magazines. G. Sanderfer, Hattiesburg, Miss.

Good ignition wrench set, Mormon bible and other things for teachers' bible and magazines, any kind, or? G. Dutton, R. F. D. 2, Ardmore, Tenn.

Exchange stamps and viewcards. Give stamps for stenographic publications and paper money. Leo J. Gauvreaux, 845 Laurier Ave. W., Ottawa, Canada.

Want guitar, magazines, or gun. Have fishing rod and tackle, Indian head pennies, copper ore, new billfold. H. G. Church, North 3rd, Ozark, Ark.

Have camera, AC radio, field glasses and stamps. Want model airplane, motorcycle, radio parts and printing press. R. Lynch, 216 Stoddert St., Jackson, Tenn.

Recipe for restoring hair, cures dandruff and promotes growth, sent for five Liberty nickels, or 100 Octagon coupons. G. Cantine, 807 Gov. Nichols St., New Orleans, La.

150 mission mixed stamps for old dime. Will trade stamps. Send me your trail approvals. U. S. wanted. Herman's, 415 S. Kedzie, Chicago, Ill

Have magazines, books, postmarks, stamps, etc. Want worn out AC and Champion spark plugs. Jos. O'Brocta, 521 Leopard, Dunkirk, N. Y.

Want ¼" copper tubing for transmitter. What's wanted? Have almost everything in radio line. Ed Wright, 53 Silver St., Patchogue, N. Y.

French imported literature and art photos. My large collection to exchange for similar material. O. Brockman, 1133 Broadway, New York City.

Want Police Gazettes or London Life magazine. Have photos, female boxers and wrestlers, deerfoot knives, or? C. Guyette, c/o Billboard, 251 W. 42nd St., N. Y. C.

1891 Mauser, taking six 8.65 cartridges, Winchester .06 repeater .22. Want guns, rifles, ammunition. R. Ahrensdorf, 40 Hollywood Ave., Crestwood, N. Y.

Printing supplies for a fishing outfit or binoculars. Will consider books, fiction only. No junk. M. Gometz, 1706—45th St., Brooklyn, N. Y.

Will send 50 good different foreign stamps for every Liberty nickel sent me. R. Enders, Box 403, Palisade, N. J.

Want poultry books, beekeepers' books and magazines. Have coins, kodak, field glasses, magazines. R. M. Raupp, 1659 Atkinson Ave., Detroit, Mich.

Harpers' bound volumes, 1840 to 1880; Civil War history, over 100 volumes. Your offer? E. Judd, 661 Platt St., Toledo, O.

5 elk teeth, Stone Mountain half dollar, 1869 nickel, book match covers, postmarks, for? E. Sams, 3648—32nd St., Astoria, N. Y.

Want envelopes used before 1900. Also want stamps of all kinds. Have most anything to trade. A. W. Jozik, 5051 Van Dyke, Detroit, Mich.

Want small metal lathes, other small machinery. Have cameras, guns, diamonds, watches, mimeograph, typewriter. R. Kirby, 2918 Arizona Ave., Dallas, Tex.

64 circus pictures for best offer in U. S. A. stamps or broken jewelry, or what? Alex Farmer, 3547 Ellis Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Want AB radio batteries, tubes and foreign stamps. Have Supertone, earphone adapter, telescope, ROA wave-trap, etc. F. Switalski, 2819 Victoria Ave., Cincinnati, O.

Want offers on set of words to ten popular songs of last ten years. Have hundreds. V. J. Wissinger, W. Milton, O.

Have tenor banjo with E-Z player and lessons. Want typewriter, or? P. P. Tkach, Glen Ullin, N. Dak.

Hounds, coon, fox, skunk, squirrel, beagles, collies, pointer, pumping outfits, field glasses. Want guineas, wrist watch, guns. Dawson, Tuckerton, N. J.

Send 100 stamps and receive one Little Blue Book. Harry Seligman, 371 Elwood, Oakland, Calif.

Want Hartrampf's Vocabularies, anything pertaining to writing and the writer. Will give anything in exchange. H. Hasse, 1126 Trowbridge, Indianapolis, Ind.

Handcuff, vault, rope escape and other magic secrets for 25 foreign stamps, cataloging 4c each. P. Tyner, Box 172, Atlanta, Ga.

Want coins before 1900. Brand-new standard business guide book for ten. A. Welo, R. 2, Maple Plain, Minn.

Wrist watches, Remington .12 pump, electric stove, watch chains, plans for house cars. Want doubles, pumps, other firearms, or? E. M. Norman, Box 86, Whipple, Ariz.

Fifteen old pennies for each gold dollar, also foreign gold. J. Dalton, Wellsville, O.

Magical fish lure, makes them bite. Recipe and instructions for old broken jewelry, watches, old dental work. F. Timmins, Big Springs, Tex.

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Brass tags, your name and address, identify tools, etc. Send 21c worth unused postage stamps for dozen. L. Abrams, 46 New, Lynbrook, N. Y.

Want emery wheels, small tools. Have Indian relics, guns, musical instruments. Honest exchange. J. Christie, Eastwood, O.

Send any number U. S. Will return twice catalog value in foreign cataloging above 4c. L. H. Wilson, 3103 Second Ave., Richmond, Va.

Send me 10 good British colonies and I will send you twenty from other countries, no damaged. H. B. Scott, 4148 Parkside Ave., Philadelphia, Pa.

What is offered for two Mexican bills, one five dollar, the other a dollar bill, series of 1915? E. H. Woods, 6019 Compton Ave., Los Angeles, Calif.

Give 15 different foreign mint blocks of four for each pair of mint 3c Washingtons sent. Orville Teegardin, Hamilton, Ind.

Good pigeons, books for dogs, pups, registered or eligible to register, small varieties. E. D. Huston, 717 Richmond St., Plainfield, N. J.

Radio buried treasure locator, plans for building locators, watches, binoculars. Want land, guns, typewriter, diamonds, jewelry, or? Norman, Box 86, Whipple, Ariz.

Swap 1913 Popular Mechanics magazine for? Harry Seligman, 371 Elwood Ave., Oakland, Calif.

Want coyote hides, bantams, pheasants, and offers. Have battery charger, mounted birds, stamps, etc. T. Gillespie, Box 93, Logan, W. Va.

Want Indian relics, cactus, curios, coins, etc. Have shells, sea urchins, starfish, shark's eggs, minerals, books. H. Stillwell, Rockville Centre, N. Y.

Have trained coon dog, also good on skunks and pheasants. Want Indian or Harley Davidson twin, not before 1925. D. Hamilton, E. Liberty, O.

Will trade precancels, stamp for stamp. 1000 mixed U. S. for 12 mint 2c commemoratives. Transfers for precancels. Karl Wilcox, 607 Bear St., Syracuse, N. Y.

Swap Florida orange grove, farm lands, lake fronts, lots, cottages for South Sea Island, West Indies, Central or South America property. Goulding, Box 543, Eustis, Fla.

Have medical and other books. Want U. S. or foreign stamps. H. Dusher, 1726 Davidson Ave., Bronx, N. Y.

Want U. S. stamps No. 282, 283, 284, 285, 287, 294, 296, 323, 324, 330, 370, 372. A. L. Hughes, Fairmount, Ga.

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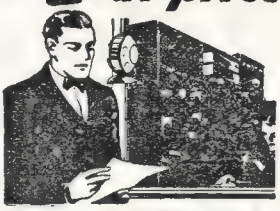

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Will give three cents for every Indian penny sent me that's dated 1866, 1867, 1868, 1869, 1870, 1871, 1872, 1877, 1878. R. Sochacki, 3722 Diversey Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Will trade one valuable foreign coin for three Indian head pennies. W. B. Kroll, 1732 W. 14th Pl., Chicago, Ill.

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Trade U. S. large cents for hand-made illuminated birth certificates with flowers, birds, etc., dated before 1820. C. W. Eckert, 713 High St., Bethlehem, Pa.

Flashlights, scientific texts, racquet, chemical apparatus, chemicals, bamboo poles, stamps, etc. Want microscope, binoculars, .22 repeater. D. Shapiro, 104 Beatrice, Toronto, Ont.

Kansas jasper, Oregon agate, Nebraska quartz, all for two Liberty head nickels. Have coins, arrows, opals. V. Lemley, Northbranch, Kans.

Religious pamphlet for 15 stamps U. S. or foreign, new or cancelled, good condition. W. Hartshorn, 4016 Bryce, Ft. Worth, Tex.

WANTED—INFORMATION

Are you looking for anyone who has been missing for a long time? If so, write down, either typed or hand-printed, all particulars and we will publish your notice in ACE-HIGH MAGAZINE. *Notices may be listed anonymously if you so desire. Before taking action concerning any answers received, be sure to lay the matter before us. We assume no responsibility for this department. Do not send any money to strangers. Notify us at once when you have found your man.*

NOTICE—An English soldier, now serving in India, asks for information about relatives by the name of Heather. Last known address: Rose Cottage, Yonkers, New York City. E. Sell, Royal Army Medical Corps, British Military Hospital, Nasirabad, Rajputana, India.

UNKNOWN MAN—I met a man about twenty-five years old or over on the train between Chattanooga, Tenn., and Johnson City, Tenn., in 1930. He came and sat with me and read a paper. Later we went into the smoker. I got off at Johnson City, and I think he was going to St. Paul. He understood me to say I lived in Ashland, Ky., but I don't. This man wore glasses. I would like to hear from him. Can tell if he's the one by mentioning things we discussed. Would like to hear from him. Please write. William Goodson, Hellier, Ky.

AROUND THE STOVE

Dear Editor:

When a magazine can grow consistently in merit and gain reader-interest like ACE-HIGH, such a periodical is to be congratulated. As an experienced artist, I wish to comment especially on your very attractive covers and other interesting illustrations. I have been reading ACE-HIGH MAGAZINE for years, and in my opinion you have always gained and maintained reader-interest. Your stories and interesting departments are what the public want.

I hope the editor will find room "Around the Stove" to print this letter, as I am always delighted to hear from people along my lines of endeavor. I am a sincere, good-looking young man, song-writer, radio accordion artist, newspaper artist, but—write for more details. I have traveled extensively and have many interesting experiences to relate, so write.

Wishing ACE-HIGH continued success, I am

Most sincerely,

URB SIGEL.

201 N. Central Ave., Marshfield, Wis.

Dear Editor:

I am a bookworm, and, being that, I can tell a good book when I see it. Therefore, I say that ACE-HIGH is a marvelous magazine.

Just a word about myself. I am tall, slender, have dark hair and eyes, am fond of writing, music, dancing, sewing, cooking, and all kinds of outdoor sports. I will exchange snapshots with all who write and will answer all letters promptly.

Come on, everybody, let's get acquainted. I am in the latter part of my 'teens and ravin' to go. Please help a lonely little French girl.

Sincerely,

(Miss) SYLVIA BREAULT.

4130 Bernard St., Chicago, Ill.

Dear Editor:

It is my belief that no magazine equals ACE-HIGH for clean and interesting stories. I have been a continuous reader for several years.

I would like to be included among the "Around the Stove" gang, and would enjoy having pen pals from everywhere.

All letters will be promptly answered and snaps cheerfully exchanged.

Yours truly,

JACK HARRIS.

499 No. Front St., Memphis, Tenn.

Dear Editor:

I have been reading your magazine and I think it is "the goods" for all time, especially for changing hours of depression into sunshine.

You will notice from the address that I am in the British Army. I should like to correspond with some members of the opposite sex, either in America or elsewhere, and will do my best to reply to letters and exchange snaps. My permanent address is R. A. S. C. Detachment, Moascar Camp, Ismailia, Egypt—not very long, when you say it fast! As I have been stationed in Egypt, Gibraltar, Cyprus and have visited Palestine, I may be able to give some interesting information on travel.

I am six feet tall, of medium build, of fair complexion, and I don't think I am likely to frighten the lasses.

Yours faithfully,

PVT. SIDNEY ELLISON.

R. A. S. C. Detachment, Moascar Camp, Ismailia, Egypt.

Dear Editor:

I wish to express my appreciation of the stories which appear in ACE-HIGH. I always read it because I have found that it always contains the most thrilling stories to be found anywhere. "The Country Store" department is a very interesting feature, too.

Will you please make some room for me "Around the Stove!" I would like to exchange letters and snapshots with readers, cowboys and cowgirls particularly.

I am twenty-one years of age, six feet tall, have light brown hair and blue eyes.

Wishing ACE-HIGH success, I am

Sincerely,

JULIAN MAKOSKI.

1431 Luce St., Chicago, Ill.

Dear Editor:

Will you please let a new reader of ACE-HIGH MAGAZINE enter your happy circle? I think ACE-HIGH is just that—"ace-high"—and I certainly have enjoyed the stories I have read in it thus far.

I, too, would like to have pen pals from everywhere. I'm a five-foot miss, weigh 125 lbs., have brown eyes, brown wavy hair and a fair complexion. Everyone who's interested, write. It's lonesome down here in ole Alabam'.

Sincerely,

ESTELLE LOGAN.

R. 2, Keener, Ala.

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BILL RILEY was a cowboy,
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There wasn't in the country,
Exceptin' Parson Sim.

And I reckon you could ride the trail
From Texas to the Line,
And braver men than Bill and Sim
I'll bet you couldn't find.

Well, Bill and Sim one winter—
'Twas back in Eighty-nine—
Were bachin' near a tradin' post
Up north close to the Line.

One night them two took in a dance,
And there they met a gal,
'Twas old Buck Berry's daughter—
His oldest daughter, Val.

Her right name it was Valentine,
They called her Val for short.
She was as fine a little rose
As bloomed in that resort.

So when she danced with other men,
Well, Bill, he'd hit the kag;
And when Sim couldn't get her smiles,
He, too, would want a jag.

Waltz, quadrille and polkey
Was danced till break of day,
And both the fiddlers got so drunk,
The darned chumps couldn't play.

Bill, he was a-stalkin' round,
Intoxicated quite
On love and Injun whiskey,
And itchin' for a fight.

While Parson Sim, he, too, had on
A pretty decent load,
And tackled Val to take her home,
In language a la mode.

But just as he was askin' her,
And she got up to go,
Bill, he come up to where they was,
A-walkin' kind of slow.

And with a sort o' stately bow,
He turned his back on Sim,
And asked Val if she wouldn't take
The homeward ride with him.

Well, 'twas over in a second,
A few cuss words was said;
Sim he was grazed along the cheek,
And Bill's was through the head.

And there poor Bill lay bleedin',
A-gasping hard for breath,
With Sim a-standin' over him,
His face as white as death.

I reckon that he thought of how,
In all those happy years,
They both had been like brothers,
And shared their joys and fears.

And with a yell some pulled their guns,
And made a sudden rush;
They thought they held a winnin' hand,
But Sim he had a flush.

Old Buck he got his gal away,
Then he come back to fight;
But everything was over,
And he saw an awful sight.

The punchers they was lyin' round,
A dozen men or more;
Looked like the field of Gettysburg,
So many strewed the floor.

And Parson Sim was dyin',
With his arms around poor Bill,
His head a-lyin' on the breast
That now was cold and still.

And then he followed after Bill;
He died without a groan,
And with Bill restin' in his arms,
He sought the great unknown.

We laid them on a sunny hill,
They're sleepin' side by side
Beneath the Western prairie soil,
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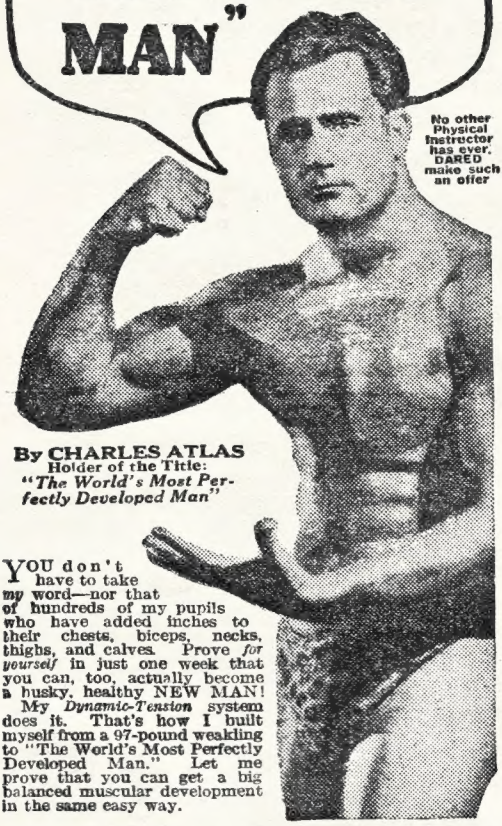

No other Physical Instructor has ever DARED make such an offer

By CHARLES ATLAS
Holder of the Title:
"The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man"

YOU don't have to take my word—nor that of hundreds of my pupils who have added inches to their chests, biceps, necks, thighs, and calves. Prove *for yourself* in just one week that you can, too, actually become a husky, healthy NEW MAN!

My *Dynamic-Tension* system does it. That's how I built myself from a 97-pound weakling to "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man." Let me prove that you can get a big balanced muscular development in the same easy way.

Gamble a Stamp — Mail Coupon for FREE Book!

Dynamic-Tension is a natural method of developing you, inside and out—without using any pills, unnatural dieting, or tricky apparatus that may strain your heart or other vital organs. It goes after such ailments as constipation, pimples, skin blotches, and other conditions that keep you from really enjoying life.

Gamble a stamp today. Mail coupon for a free copy of my new illustrated book, *"Everlasting Health and Strength."* It shows you from actual photos, how I have developed my pupils to the same perfectly balanced proportions of my own physique.

Jot your name and address down on the coupon. Send it to me personally. CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 9-ZZ, 133 East 23rd Street, New York City.

CHARLES ATLAS Dept. 9-ZZ,
133 East 23rd Street, New York City

I want the proof that your system of Dynamic-Tension will make a New Man of me—give me a healthy, husky body, and big muscle development. Send me your free book, "Everlasting Health and Strength."

Name.....
(Please print or write plainly)
Address.....
City.....State.....

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Our 1932 Cut Price Offers a Remarkable Opportunity to Own a 21 JEWEL—

Santa Fe Special

Send for Catalog Now!

Compare the Santa Fe Special *with other Watches costing 30% to 50% More*

Send No Cash In addition to our NEW LOW PRICE, I will send for your approval one of these Standard Watches, guaranteed for a lifetime of satisfactory service, not only by the Santa Fe Watch Company, but by the Great Illinois Watch Factory. So accurate, Government officials carry them; so perfect and beautiful, jewelers say they are worth 1-3 to 1-2 more than we ask for them. I will send you one to see WITHOUT ONE PENNY DOWN—allow you to wear it 30 days FREE—then sell it to you on easy payments.

Diamond Rings—Wrist Watches

Write for our New Diamond Ring of Romance and Bulova Wrist Watch Catalog, showing marvelous new designs. Never have we been able to offer such beautiful diamond rings and artistic dependable watches at such low prices. The catalog is sent FREE.

Ask for our Spot Cash Offer. Good for 30 days only.

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Please send me catalog I have checked.
Railroad and dress Pocket Watches.....( )
Ladies' and Men's Wrist Watches.....( )
Ladies' and Men's Diamond Rings.....( )

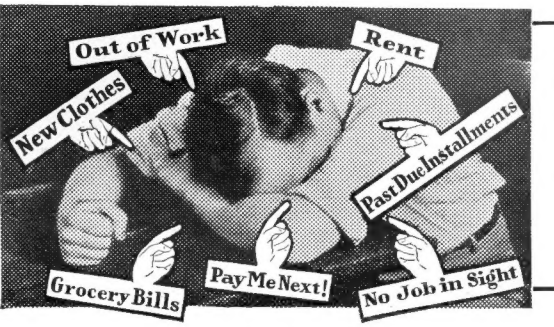
Name.....
Address.....
.....

Are You Out of a Job?

If You Need Money Send Me Your Name and I'll Show You How to Start Making Up to

$15 a day

With My Thrilling New Introductory Package Plan



A Breath-Taking Announcement That Will Put Both Men and Women to Work at Once

Distributing Trial Packages

No More Worries - - - No More Bill Collectors - - - No More Skimping - - - Now You Can Have Money in Your Pocket All the Time - - - Here's the Quick New Way to Make It!

Your Own GROCERIES at Wholesale

When I send you instructions for making money on my new Trial Package Plan I also give you rock-bottom wholesale prices on your own groceries—about half of regular retail prices. This is in addition to your regular pay. So you can MAKE big money in cash and SAVE big money on the things you use in your own home.

I'M not much of a hand for fancy writing—but I can think up ideas. When I thought of my new Introductory Package Plan I knew it was going to be a great thing; a great thing for me—and a positive blessing to hundreds who had been out of work. Best of all, with my new system, you can make as much in "hard times" as in "boom" times. So if you're wondering where the money is coming from to pay your bills, you're just the person I'm looking for. Your worries are over right now.

GO TO WORK AT ONCE

My new plan provides immediate cash earnings for both men and women. So long as you're honest and reliable you're eligible for one of these jobs. And I want someone in every territory because this new Trial Package idea is sweeping the country. So you can go to work at once right in your own locality.

NOT AN EXPERIMENT—EARNINGS PROVED

You may think this sounds too good to be true. But that's not so. Before I announced the idea for national use I tried it out thoroughly, and the men and women who tested it made big money right from the start. For example, Sol. Korenblit of New York took in enough money in one week to make $110 for himself—when you count commissions. H. L. Lennon wrote me, "Started with you Friday morning and cleared $39.63 in 7½ hours." Mrs. Eva McCutchen, in Oklahoma, quit an office job and made $26.55 profit the first day with my system. Mrs. Jewel Hackett, here in Ohio, tried it and cleared $33 in 7 hours. I have hundreds of reports like these to prove that this Trial Package Plan is a winner.

NO DEPRESSION WITH A PLAN LIKE THIS

You may wonder at making such big money even in hard times. But this plan of Trial Package distribution is doing exactly that for hundreds. The "Trial Package" Plan is simple. Your first work on this new job will be to distribute introductory packages of my line to people in your neighborhood. After they have had a chance to use these products and see how they save money, they give you their orders for full size packages. You handle the money and deliver the goods. And a big share of every dollar we take in goes into your pocket as your pay. Pay for this work is frequently as high as $15 a day. Even at the start, delivering only 35 trial packages a day will pay you $8.75—regular and steady.

30 CUSTOMERS—$15 FOR YOU

In no time at all, you should have a big list of regular customers that you call on every two weeks. And with an established route which requires only 30 calls a day, your pay can easily be $15 a day steady. If you want to have only a 15-call route and work only half-days, you can still make up to $7.50 a day—and even that gives you $45 a week—not bad for half time.

DON'T SEND MONEY—JUST NAME

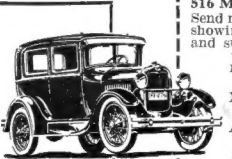
I don't want your money. All I want is your name and address so I can lay before you bona fide proof of the success of this plan—proof that you too can make good money. Remember, you invest no money in a stock of goods. I furnish the capital, set you up in business, show you how to start earning money at once. It costs nothing to investigate. You read the proof, then decide for yourself. Since you can't lose and since you may find just the kind of steady, good-pay work you want, tear out this valuable blank right now, fill it in and mail it to me at once.

A. L. MILLS, President
516 Monmouth Ave., Cincinnati, Ohio

FREE AS AN EXTRA BONUS

NEW FORD TUDOR SEDAN!

This is NOT a contest or a "prize" for solving puzzles. This Ford is not given to you in place of your money. No! But to everyone who proves to me that he is "on the job" and building up a real trade through proper and courteous handling of customers, I give this car as an extra bonus—in addition to what you make every day in cash. If you already have a car I'll give you an equal amount in cash instead. I'll explain this fully when I send you details of my Trial Package Plan.



GOOD for FREE OFFER

A. L. MILLS, PRESIDENT,
516 Monmouth Ave., Cincinnati, Ohio

Send me full particulars of your Trial Package Plan showing how I can make up to $15 a day—steady and sure. This is not an order for any goods and the plan you send is not to cost me one cent, now or at any other time.

Name . . . . . .

Address . . . . . .

. . . . . .

(Please Print or Write Plainly)

"Nature in the Raw is seldom MILD"
THE PILLAGE OF PARIS
"Nature in the Raw"—after the great French artist Luminais . . . inspired by the savage fierceness of untamed Norsemen in the ruthless capture of Paris—845 A.D.

Copr 1932, The American Tobacco Co.

—and raw tobaccos have no place in cigarettes

They are *not* present in Luckies . . . the *mildest* cigarette you ever smoked

WE buy the finest, the very finest tobaccos in all the world—but that does not explain why folks everywhere regard Lucky Strike as the mildest cigarette. The fact is, we never overlook the truth that "Nature in the Raw is Seldom Mild"—so these fine tobaccos, after proper aging and mellowing, are then given the benefit of that Lucky Strike purifying process, described by the words—"It's toasted" That's why folks in every city, town and hamlet say that Luckies are such mild cigarettes.

"It's toasted"

That package of mild Luckies

"If a man write a better book, preach a better sermon, or make a better mouse-trap than his neighbor, tho he build his house in the woods, the world will make a beaten path to his door."—RALPH WALDO EMERSON. Does not this explain the world-wide acceptance and approval of Lucky Strike?